Learn Where We Teach: A journey to critical intersubjective awareness via self study and action research with primary school teachers

Jean McGowan

Supervisor: Dr Joss Winn

September 2018

A thesis submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Lincoln for the Professional Doctor of Philosophy in Education Award in the School of Education, University of Lincoln, UK

Abstract

The education system in Ireland is increasingly held accountable by government and media for the country's performance in the globalised knowledge economy. International test-based comparisons drive the competitive focus and permeate each level of the system with a subsequent reduction in the space available to identify and address local and individual educational needs. The neoliberal political and economic agenda underpinning competitiveness may not be explicitly identified by practitioners yet is experienced in daily practice as individuals and organisations strive to demonstrate achievement of its targets.

This research originated in an urban disadvantaged primary school located in provincial Ireland. Motivation to engage in research was initiated by the contradiction I experienced as practice in our school became increasingly directed by external strategies designed to improve results rather than through engagement with the principles of education underpinning the Primary School Curriculum. Those principles explicated that the child's language, prior learning and cultural background constituted the context for learning. Presupposing teachers' professional agency, the curriculum envisaged that teacher judgements would inform the content and methodologies adopted to meet the specific contextual and individual needs of pupils.

Research began with my unexamined subjective assumptions about education and a naivety about the political, cultural and social forces that had structured my perspectives. Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework of capital, field and habitus facilitated self-study reflection at an entry level to research methodology. Deeper reflexive engagement with Bourdieuian concepts enabled research into the positioning of teachers within the cultural milieu of Irish primary education.

An action research approach was adopted to engage colleagues in the research process. It centred on a context specific photographic intervention named PLACE (Photographs to stimulate Learning, Language and Communication in Education) designed to connect children's lived experience outside of school with their work and relationships in school. Moreover it aimed to facilitate teachers' knowledge and understanding of the local context for its inclusion in the curriculum. Two cycles of PLACE, over a two year period were carried out focussing on teachers' perceptions before and after each cycle.

Findings indicated that engagement in PLACE had positive effects on teachers' intersubjective acknowledgement of pupils' indigenous knowledge and culture. Analysis of those findings through a Bourdieuian framework uncovered themes of continuity and certainty in teachers' practice perspectives that indicated a practice constraining collective cultural homogeneity. A subsequent historical review of literature pertaining to Irish education revealed deeper issues related to the structuring forces of the interrelated mesh of historical, political, socio-economic, denominational and ideological issues that prefigured more recent neoliberal policy in the unique educational context of Irish primary education.

This thesis affirms action research as an evolving process that enabled my gradual transition from a practice orientation to one that explored beneath the surface of current professional practice to reveal the tenacity of past traditions on individual and collective understandings. It contributed to actionable knowledge about practice in the conceptualisation of a cultural architecture that captures these prefigurative forces. It suggests that the research process and findings are of commensurate value to knowledge growth.

Contents

Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to Dr Joss Winn for his guidance and continuous support during the latter half of this research journey. I also acknowledge and thank Emeritus Professor Angela Thody and Dr Sarah Amsler for their encouragement and advice as I began the research process. The staff of the School of Education created a supportive framework throughout.

The encouragement of the many critical friends who travelled the same doctoral research journey with and before me through Mayo Education Centre has been invaluable.

I especially thank my colleagues who engaged in this research with me. They gave their time and shared their perspectives about practice generously. Their voices contributed to this thesis.

I have been so fortunate that my family have been patient and encouraging. To Seamus, Domhnall, Féidhlim and Clíodhna - thank you for being there!

A final word of gratitude goes to the pupils and parents of Oakwood PS. I have learned so much from them, in the place where I teach.

List of Diagrams

List of Tables

List of Appendices

Glossary of Acronyms and Terms

BERA: British Educational Research Association

BOM: Board of Management

Community National Schools: Multidenominational schools organised by the state

CPD: Continuing Professional Development

DEIS: Delivering Equality of Education in School

DES: Department of Education and Skills

DESI: Department of Education Inspectorate

EAL: English as an Additional Language

EBD: Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

ECT: Early Career Teacher

Educate Together Schools: A network of multidenominational schools managed by a non-government organisation

EPV: Extra Personal Leave

EU: European Union

Gaelscoileanna: Schools that use Irish language as the medium of communication

ICT: Information and Communication technology

ITE: Initial Teacher Education

LD: Learning Difficulties

NCCA: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

NCSE: National Council for Special Education

NEWB: National Education Welfare Board

NPM: New Public Service Management

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PDST: Professional Development Service for Teachers

PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment

PLACE: Photographs that stimulate Language Learning and Communication in Education. An intervention designed as part of this research for teachers to explore their pupils' cultural and contextual knowledge.

SEN: Special Education Needs

SESE: Social, Environmental and Scientific Education

SPHE: Social Personal and health Education

Teaching Council: The Teaching Council is the regulatory body for the teaching profession in Ireland

TIMSS: Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

Travellers: An indigenous minority ethnic group in Irish society

WSE: Whole School Evaluation conducted by Department of Education Inspectors

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

This thesis reports on the role of action research in deepening understandings of the influence of historical policy on culturally-situated educational practice. It builds on the theory of practice architecture (Bourdieu, 1990; Schatzki, 2003; Kemmis et al., 2014) to conceptualise the theory of a cultural architecture specific to Irish primary education. It argues that awareness of the influences of the cultural architecture on individual and collective teacher perceptions enables teaching practice to become more responsive to the diverse needs of both pupils and teachers. It documents my reflexive engagement with theoretical and experiential knowledge through the process of engaging in action research. It demonstrates how that process gradually broadened my perception from one confined by practice to an awareness of how the practice itself is shaped by historical, political and cultural traditions.

The research is set in the context of a disadvantaged primary school in Ireland in the aftermath of the economic recession which began in 2008 coupled with the Government's reaction to Ireland's decline in PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results of 2009. The subsequent national educational policy intensified the focus on raising literacy and numeracy standards to the levels achieved in the highest performing countries in order to compete with them for multinational investment (DES, 2011, 8). It was the subsequent changes in practice in the primary school in which I work that initiated a search for deeper understanding of my role as an educator as I endeavoured to maintain a holistic focus on pupil development, while being increasingly held accountable for meeting literacy and numeracy targets.

My motivation to engage in research was initiated by the contradiction I experienced as practice in our school became increasingly directed by top-down external strategies designed to improve results rather than through engagement with the principles of education which underpinned the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999). Those principles envisaged the active engagement of the child in the learning process and explicitly stated that the child's language, prior learning and cultural background constitutes the context for learning (DES, 1999, 8), with the teacher

acting as a "facilitator and guide who interprets the child's learning needs and responds to them", (DES, 1999, 20). Whilst I experienced this contradiction in practice (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002) I did not have the formal theoretical knowledge to challenge the "relevant research" (DES, 2011,7) that underpinned the policy emphasis directing my work. I found myself complicit in leading practice that did not align with my values. At a deeper motivational level the desire to improve children's learning opportunities in this school had been central to my work for almost three decades. While there had been improvements in many children's engagement in learning, there were some who did not appear to engage fully or attain the learning outcomes expected for them. I wanted to learn how to improve teaching practice to reach these children. The research process from initiation to completion is underpinned by a social justice perspective which holds that Ireland's education system should and can cater for the learning needs and strengths of all learners regardless of their cultural, ethnic, gender or socio-economic status, as envisaged in the principles of the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999). Teachers are positioned as the professionals who interpret the curriculum and are therefore central to its translation from text to practice. The critical exploration of the positioning and practice of primary school teachers in Ireland that emerged through the process of this research informs how that interpretation is framed.

The school in which I work as head teacher, named Oakwood PS for the purposes of this thesis, is located in a low socio-economic area of a large provincial town in the west of Ireland. Traditionally early school leaving was prevalent in this area as people joined the labour force in manual labouring or service industry jobs. Long-term unemployment continues to be common. The majority of families lived and continue to live in social housing. On the 2016 Pobal HP Deprivation Index the area is rated as being within the most disadvantaged, relative to the national average in Ireland (Haase and Pratschke, 2017). Oakwood PS is a co-educational school managed by the Catholic Church with pupils ranging in age from four to twelve years old. It is categorised as a disadvantaged primary school. I use the word 'categorised' intentionally as prior to engaging in this research I had not questioned how or by whom some schools came to be identified as disadvantaged. I accepted the reality as I perceived it, believing it was *the* reality. My subjectivity was aligned with the dominant social ontology (Schatzki, 2003). However I believed that children

could be supported through education to improve their access to life's opportunities, which had not been as available to their parents or grandparents. This belief was based on experiential learning as I was an example of someone who had benefitted from the education system. The research uncovered that many of the beliefs I held were unexamined and part of the taken-for-granted familiarity of Irish education culture (O'Sullivan, 2005).

This first chapter outlines how engagement with Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework challenged my thinking about my perceptions and beliefs. As I engaged reflexively with the concepts of habitus, cultural capital and field on my past and current position within the education system, I was enabled to think differently about the familiar aspects of my practice. It initiated a process of self-study, also known as first-person action research. The insights about my own thinking that emerged through the act of self-study encouraged me to adopt action research as a methodology to enable other teachers in the school to similarly reflect on their perceptions about our practice. Engaging with others through action research is known as second-person inquiry. The chapter then discusses the twin tenets of ethicality and reflexivity which underpinned both self-study and second-person action research. The discussion of both ethics and reflexivity precedes an exploration of neoliberalism: a hegemonic force which can influence one's reflexive and ethical perspective. The chapter concludes with an overview of the whole thesis. Particular emphasis is placed on the process of research that enabled my transition from a practice orientation to a researcher of practice orientation with an insight of how one's current practice and perceptions are framed by historical, economic and cultural traditions. The process of uncovering these interrelated traditions led to the conceptualisation of a cultural architecture, specific to the Irish primary school sector. This concept of cultural architecture is a contribution to actionable knowledge, which is knowledge that is theoretically robust, and usable (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014).

Beginning to see my familiar practice through a different lens

Initially in a practice orientation, I began by exploring the international peer-reviewed literature for guidance on good practice in disadvantaged settings to inform my practice in school. I first encountered the theoretical work of Pierre Bourdieu in

an article by Mills and Gale (2007) but was affronted with his assertion that schools play a significant role in reproducing social and cultural inequalities. Moreover there appeared to be a significant body of research which endorsed his theory (Mills and Gale, 2007; Ball, 2006; Reay, 1998; Lawrence, 2009; O'Sullivan, 2005; Lareau, 2003) suggesting that teachers inadvertently contributed to this reproduction of inequality through their practice in schools. Intending to challenge this theory in the context in which I practiced, subsequent engagement with it stimulated a research journey that challenged my taken-for-granted perspectives, beliefs and values.

Bourdieu constructed the concepts of cultural capital, field and habitus to enable exploration of how forms of privilege were passed from one generation to the next with particular reference to the roles of one's family of origin and formal education in the process. The concepts were not descriptive but rather "a means of construction, which make it possible to see things that one could not see previously" (Bourdieu, 1993, 32). Bourdieu defined cultural capital as an indicator and a basis of class position, including cultural attitudes, preferences, and behaviour that are conceptualized as "tastes" (Bourdieu, 1979/1984), acquired initially from one's family, which are valued in particular settings. Whilst all groups in society have cultural capital, he maintained that schools recognised and rewarded those who embodied behaviour and attitudes associated with the dominant in society. Fields are 'structured spaces or positions' in which cultural capital has value. Bourdieu maintained that there are general laws in fields, even if the fields are different, but depend on people willing to compete for recognition within the field. Knowledge and understanding of the laws of the field allows one to access its benefits, particularly if one has internalised "a system of dispositions" (Bourdieu, 1993,76) recognised as consistent with the objectives of the field, which Bourdieu named as one's 'habitus'. Habitus provides a means of "analysing the experience of social agents and the objective structures which make this experience possible" (Reay, 2004, 439). The three concepts interrelate and together form a theoretical framework with which to analyse social conditions and relations.

As important as the construction of these concepts is Bourdieu's advice on how these concepts are used in research. He considered his theory as a set of "thinking tools" (Wacquant, 1989, 50), which he urged researchers "to put in motion and make them work" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, 228), thus connecting theory and

methodology. He also advised that researchers analyse their own subjective position in the field of study through reflexive engagement with each of the concepts in the framework (Bourdieu, 1990). The first step in using this framework is to analyse the particular field and its position in relation to other fields of power. Secondly, one must map out the objective structure of relations between the positions occupied by the agents in the field. He stated that these positions are inseparable from the practices and expressions of those agents. Thirdly, one must analyse the habitus brought by agents to their positions in the field. As overlapping concepts, using them "is an iterative, reflective, sometimes messy, and imperfect process" (Winkle-Wagner, 2010, 95), but it facilitated insight into my "feel for the game" (Wacquant, 1989,43) in the field of primary school education.

Initially I began by examining my primary habitus. This revealed how well prepared I was for settling into and succeeding in school. That I began with an exploration of habitus retrospectively reveals that early in the research process I was unable to discern the fields of power which affect education in Ireland. They remained obscured until later in the process, which for me demonstrates the value of beginning where one can, rather than remain subject to unperceived forces. Through reflection on my own primary habitus, I recognised that while the mundane cultural capital of my family facilitated my progression in school, it did so in an indiscernible way that appeared natural. Awareness of my previously unrecognised childhood advantages increased my consciousness of the obstacles people without those advantages encounter in the education system. I also became more aware that many aspects of my teaching practice had been framed by my habitus, which aligned with the dominant culture of education in Ireland.

Research Questions

My initial purpose was to become "research literate" (BERA, 2014), to make sense of the "relevant research" (DES, 2011,7) informing policy at the time, which was driving practice in our school but did not seem to align with the principles underpinning the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999). The philosophy of the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999, 8-9) encapsulated my interpretation of good education, in which the school provided a conduit between the child's existing knowledge and understanding to learning more about themselves, others and the

wider world. The relationship between teachers and children was central to this conduit. At the outset, I did not have the conceptual tools necessary to articulate the substance of my concerns that practice had diverged from these principles. What I experienced as a feeling, I recognise now as tacit knowledge, which Polanyi described as personal inarticulate knowledge (Polanyi, 1962, 99) and Bourdieu captured as habitus. Bourdieu's framework facilitated the articulation of tacit knowledge through my self-study. It also provided a structure to engage colleagues in second-person research. Using Bourdieu's framework, the following research questions were formulated:

1. In what ways do teachers' habitus and cultural capital influence their teaching practice in this school?
2. To what extent do teachers' habitus influence their perceptions of indigenous cultural capitals and related habitus of the children they teach?
3. How do teachers interpret the curriculum to meet the learning needs of children with diverse habitus and cultural capitals?
4. How does engaging in action research contribute to teachers' acknowledgement of indigenous cultural diversity in this school?

These questions were explored through an action research approach with colleagues in Oakwood PS. Interviews were used to gather teacher perspectives on practice in this school before and after they engaged in an action research intervention designed to improve their knowledge and understanding of the cultural context of the children they teach. The intervention - PLACE - (Photographs that stimulate Language, Learning and Communication in Education) was based on a similar intervention in the US which found that teachers benefit from support to learn about children's cultural context if it differs from their own (Allen, 2002). It appeared to present an opportunity for others to engage in a process of reflection on the influences of their habitus on practice and to recognise the habitus and cultural capital of the children they taught through action aligned with the principles of the curriculum. The intervention of PLACE also aligned with the ethical values underpinning the Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers (Teaching Council, 2012).

Ethics

Ethics are defined as the principles, systems, standards and codes of conduct relating to what is right and wrong (Robson, 2011, 525). They are the moral principles that govern behaviour (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013, 319). Yet when the principles of one's tacit knowledge do not align with those of current policy, one struggles to differentiate right from wrong. This research process was an effort to re-establish my ethical clarity regarding practice, therefore ethics underpin the purpose of the research (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2007; Hammersley and Traianou, 2014; Pring, 2004,150). In writing this thesis I emphasise from the beginning the ethical deliberations which permeated each stage and aspect of the research which underpinned methodological decisions along the way. Adopting a stance that foregrounds ethicality indicates a commitment to quality research as it suggests a focus on care for the participants and consequential stakeholders in addition to the processes and the product of the research endeavour (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2007).

Regarding research, both Pring (2004) and Williams (2010) differentiate between the custom and character of ethics suggesting that custom relies more on correct procedures of research which may or may not provide for the nuances of ethical conduct required in individual research projects. Character ethics on the other hand explicitly relies on the judgement of the researcher based on one's moral disposition or virtue. Pring (2004) suggests dispositions can be further subdivided into moral virtues and intellectual virtues. Excellence in intellectual virtues does not guarantee virtuous action and incapacity in intellectual virtues does not inhibit living moral virtues (Pring, 2004, 145). Yet to be able to articulate concerns and locate evidence to support or criticise claims in the search for better understanding and improvement of practice requires both moral and intellectual virtues. It is an ongoing process that requires researchers to rely on their own reflexivity to honour their moral dispositions, when custom ethics prove to be necessary but insufficient (Williams, 2010, 261).

Reflexivity

Initially I found reflexivity problematic and evasive; despite informative guidance from key research text books (Cohen et al., 2011; Bryman, 2012; Savin-Baden and

Howell Major, 2013), I was unsure if I was actually being reflexive. Following the process of inquiry into my understanding of practice I understand it now as an embodied, intellectual attribute in which I explore and tentatively understand how and why I think, relate, react, feel, engage and respond as I do, in personal, social and professional contexts. Distinguishing between personal reflexive habits (Archer, 2003; Bourdieu, 1990; Freire, 1998) and developing researcher reflexivity (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Pillow 2010; Wilcox 2009; Morrison 2007; Williams 2010; McNiff and Whitehead 2002; Coghlan and Brannick 2014; Titchen 2015;) enabled the holistic effort of ethical research embedded in this thesis. When recognised and activated - over time- reflexivity enables articulation of what, how and why one thinks and relates with the world as one does.

At a personal level, Archer suggests "everyone is a reflexive being" (Archer, 2003, 167) suggesting that "reflexivity itself is held to depend upon conscious deliberations that take place through internal conversations about matters that are primarily and necessarily social" (Archer, 2007, 3). Archer emphasises the necessary interplay between subjectivity and objectivity and recognises that structural properties can impinge or enable individual's agency. Reflexive internal conversations mediate how individuals respond to the socio-cultural milieu they inhabit. Her proposition is that our human powers of reflexivity have causal efficacy - towards ourselves, our society and relations between them. It follows that individual reflexivity is influenced by societal norms.

Research on reflexivity suggests that internal conversations proved to be radically heterogeneous, despite the intuitive conviction of many that others conduct their internal conversations in a similar way to themselves (Archer, 2003, 342). Following analysis of data generated through qualitative interviews she distinguished three different modes of reflexivity, with their corresponding origins, orientations and outcomes, namely communicative reflexivity, autonomous reflexivity and meta-reflexivity. The origins of the three different modes of reflexivity are found at the nexus between contexts in early life and individual concerns, though neither factor is static nor are the modes of reflexivity. Each mode is an emergent property that is dependent upon the individual and their social context. She concluded that practitioners of each of the three different modes of reflexivity adopt generically different stances toward society. While this taxonomy distinguishes the differences

between the modes of reflexivity, it does not rank one mode as superior or inferior to the others. Each mode of reflexivity facilitates people to reach their own conclusions about how the structures or forces within society will either support or inhibit their achievement of their own life projects from which they acquire their stance. "Stances are basic orientations of subjects to society" (Archer, 2003,343) and are suggestive of active agents who are people who exert some control over their lives.

Just as each mode of reflexivity can actively evolve and change, each can be impeded or displaced and become what Archer describes as fractured. Fractured reflexives engage in internal conversations but gain no instrumental guidance as to what to do in practice. Archer's main argument is that fractured reflexives are passive agents, people to whom things merely happen. Like bones, fractured reflexivity can heal. Whereas one would imagine that it is necessary to heal personal fractured reflexive capacity before one engages in research that requires reflexivity, I have found the opposite. Reflexivity emerges through a process of reflecting, dialoguing, reading and writing about one's practice, "to study a practice is simultaneously to study self: a study of self-in-relation-to-other" (Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001, 14) and the context in which one practices.

Locating Neoliberal Influences in Practice

Reflexive understanding of my own interpretation of the specific context of Oakwood PS, required exploration of broader and less obvious political and socio-economic influences on my perspectives, beginning with - neoliberalism. In recent years the term 'neoliberalism' has become increasingly familiar, often in pejorative commentaries of current national and international political, economic and social situations (Davies, 2014). Stephen Ball suggests it is one of those terms that is used so widely and loosely that it is in danger of becoming meaningless (Kneyber, 2016, 39), while Monbiot considers neoliberalism a pervasive ideology governing our lives without our conscious recognition or identification of it. He suggests its anonymity protects it from scrutiny (Monbiot, 2016).

Davies (2016) considers that the root of the difficulty and meaning of neoliberalism is the way it straddles the terrain of sociology and economics. Definitions abound, but according to Davies (2014) they agree on the following points: Neoliberalism aims to produce a new social and political model. It is inspired by, but differs from,

Victorian liberalism. In contrast to the latter's laissez-faire approach, neoliberalism calls for the state to be an active force. The state must promote the ethical and political vision that centres on competitive activity. Neoliberal policy targets institutions and activities which lie *outside* of the market, such as education, health care, households, public administrations and trade unions, to mould them into more 'market-like' entities, or to neutralise or disband them. He defines neoliberalism as "the elevation of market-based principles and techniques of evaluation to the level of state-endorsed norms" (Davies, 2016, xiv).

The evolution and implementation of neoliberal philosophy was an incremental and opportunistic process. While Clarke (2004) traces the foundations of neoliberalism back to Adam Smith's 19th century argument for liberalism, Davies (2014) marks the post-World War 1 era, when the emergent inequalities of liberalism caused social discontent as its genesis. The perceived challenge at that time, faced by those in favour of economic liberalism was to create conditions that accommodated or rebuffed workers' growing and collectively organised campaigns for social improvements. Ordoliberalism or German neoliberalism, premised on a strong set of state rules to structure the environment within which competitive markets could operate, emerged to meet the challenge.

Ordoliberalism envisaged a market-conforming social policy in which workers became entrepreneurs of labour power, endowed with firm social and ethical values that complemented economic growth. It rejected social welfare as a policy which encouraged the devitalisation of workers' entrepreneurial ethic. It aimed not to govern for social policy, but to govern through society to embed in it a competitive and enterprising ethos (Bonefeld, 2012, 65).The ordoliberal philosophy was shared most notably in Friedrich von Hayek's book *The Road to Serfdom,* published in 1944, which served as a popular introduction to neoliberal ideas for decades. The philosophy was spread through networks of liberal intellectuals from around the world, who in turn connected with policy makers. Ordoliberal idealism provided the basis for the 1957 Treaty of Rome, on which the European Union was founded (Davies, 2014).

The Chicago School of Economics extended the neoliberal agenda, driven by the belief in the capacity of economics to explain all forms of human behaviour, whether

inside or outside of markets (Davies, 2014). For instance, categories such as human capital provided the ideological foundation for the conceptualisation of meritocracy (the actual term was coined by Michael Young in 1958). Meritocracy implied that citizens were expected to capitalise on their own merits, through enterprise and effort (McNamee, 2018), arguably extending neoliberal subjectivity into personal and social thinking. While ideologies can be treated as sets of beliefs emanating from powerful groups in society designed to protect their own interests and simultaneously provide socially acceptable explanations for social inequality (Cohen et al., 2011; McNamee, 2018), their acceptance demonstrates how neoliberal policy governs through society.

It is widely held that the economic crisis of the 1980s and the demise of Keynesian economics presented an opportunity for neoliberal economic policies to emerge and dominate political attitudes and actions (Clarke, 2004; Ball, 2006; Davies, 2014; Lynch et al., 2012). Public spending was reduced and trade union power was curbed through legislation, police power and privatisation, resulting in greater returns to capital, and lower returns to labour. Inequality increased from the 1980s onwards (Davies, 2014). Whereas the rise of neoliberalism is associated with the leadership of Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the USA, the neoliberal paradigm had been incubating for decades, awaiting its opportunity to emerge as dominant. Those who argue that this neoliberal model is unrealistic and creates inequality miss the point according to Clarke (2004). The point, he suggests, is for neoliberalism not to make a model that is more adequate to the real world, but to make the real world more adequate to its model. It aims to structure society around the principle of competition and the ethos of competitiveness (Davies, 2015).

Embedding Neoliberal Ideology in Public Services

Stephen Ball maintains that the competitive ethos of neoliberalism, under the guise of improvement and reform, is spread throughout public services and private subjectivity by means of three major, interrelated technologies, namely: " Market, Management and Performance" (Ball, 2016, 1049). The first of these - the market- is the most obvious link to the economic worldview. It consists of arrangements of competition and choice and various forms of privatisation, which aim to make public service organisations more business-like. Globally education is particularly troubled by this competitive market ethos (Connell, 2013) which has impacted international,

national, local and individual perceptions of education. Beginning in primary school, children are redefined as competitive individuals. At local level schools compete for selection through parental choice based on certain standards the school is seen to achieve. Nations compete with each other on international comparative tests such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) or in Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Entrepreneurs have moved into the education sector and now provide many services to improve competitive performances of children, teachers and schools. Educational services previously provided by the state are now more available to those who choose to or can afford to pay for them. Parents are redefined as consumers of educational products that enhance their children's competitive advantage.

The second technology - management - is the delivery system for this change. It is a method of reculturing or reforming organisations for the competitive market-like environment (Ball, 2016). However Ball suggests that it is important to recognise that the management required is not located solely in the person or people tasked with the role but part of the policy framework of the state (Ball, 2006, 11), known as managerialism. This new managerialism or new public service management (NPM) is a political project, a new mode of governance that provides a unique type of moral education for organisations modelled on business. Moreover NPM is more about establishing new sets of values and practices embedded in a complex set of social, political and economic changes (Lynch et al., 2012). The Public Service Management Act (1997), designed to reform the Irish Public Service, initiated NPM in all its sectors, including education (Ireland, 1997). NPM "demanded a bifurcation of power that allowed control to remain centralised while responsibilities were decentralised" (Lynch et al., 2012, 11), with those on the periphery, such as professionals working in the services, increasingly held accountable for the achievement of targets set centrally. Reform involves instilling the attitude and culture within which workers feel themselves accountable and simultaneously personally invested in the organisation (Ball, 2003).

The level of personal commitment to the organisation and in turn to the overall reform and improvement plan is demonstrated through the third technology - performance. Performance or performativity is an integrating technology which facilitates the competitive ethos desired by NMP in that it requires "individual

practitioners to organize themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations" (Ball, 2003,215), rather than by their own or collective professional judgements.

> Performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change - based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic). The performances (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality', or 'moments' of promotion or inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization within a field of judgement.
>
> (Ball, 2003, 216)

While Ball maintains that these technologies work to align public services with the neoliberal worldview, he also suggests that they present what may be perceived as opportunities or challenges to and within organisations. The ethics of competition and performance differ from the older moral ethics and responsibility which underpinned professional judgement. Neoliberalism enters into individual thinking and subjectivity as people endeavour to demonstrate their commitment to their profession, their organisation or their advancement and security within the organisation by the outputs of their performance. It becomes necessary to make productivity and progress visible. Others find their values challenged as the time and energy required to present the array of performative data required detracts from the energy and time available for their core service work. The danger overall is that aspects of service that are less measurable and marketable lose out to aspects that can indicate the successful performance of the individual or organisation. What is measureable becomes valuable and informs practice rather than reports on it (Ball, 2016; Biesta, 2009; Stronach, 2010). Moreover these technologies are not formally introduced or imposed but emerge gradually as reforms and improvements are sought in the delivery of public services. Proposed improvements may initially appear to align with the purpose and values of the front-line service providers. Small incremental changes make other changes to practice possible or even necessary. Ball (2016) suggests these changes to practice do not appear initially or individually significant, but when the accumulation of the effects of many changes over time is considered the alignment with market ethics becomes more obvious. However when one is occupied with reaching the targets that indicate one's commitment to a quality

service, the space for adequate reflection on core values diminishes. Moreover it is recognised that as targets and indicators of performance are constantly open to change, evaluation and comparison, insecurity and doubt about one's capacity to use professional judgement increase (Ball, 2016).

Ireland and neoliberalism

Ireland operates within the Anglo-American zone of influence for reasons of history, geography, language, emigration, colonisation and trade. It is unsurprising that the neoliberal policies of Thatcherism and Reaganism were adopted here (Lynch et al., 2012). What is surprising is how covertly it was introduced into public services. During the 1980s the Irish government espoused the rhetoric of social democracy while adopting neoliberal economic policies in response to rising indebtedness. In contrast to Britain, where the government was explicitly neoliberal, the Irish government achieved its public service spending cuts through the medium of social partnership with employers, trade unions, farmers and civil organisations; all were involved in the negotiations and subsequent agreements for policy. Public service spending was reduced, tax cuts were provided for business and industry and wage costs were reduced. The power of trade unions was diluted, not through force but through persuasive partnership (Lynch et al., 2012). It has been suggested that the hard medicine of low wages and public sector cuts which followed paved the way for the economic growth of the 1990's, but that disregards the very low tax rates that attracted foreign industrial investment (Allen, 2000). A more palatable story suggests the quality of Ireland's education system had been a key causal factor in the economic revival (Coolahan, 2003). That was the story the government emphasised as it identified education as a strategic force for the social, economic and cultural development of the state which in turn would sustain its improved position in a competitive global environment (Coolahan, 2003). Following closely on the aforementioned Public Service Management Act (1997) the Education Act (1998) was published based on consensus achieved through a highly consultative process of all stakeholders and informed by a review of the system by the OECD (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). It initiated a major agenda of change and reform in Irish education (Coolahan, 2003), with teacher union approval (McElduff and Sheehan, 2001). Retrospectively, the quiet arrival of neoliberal state policy to education in Ireland can be identified. However by 2011 its

demands were loudly articulated in the DES policy document (DES, 2011). The source and purpose of the education reform agenda was also revealed.

> Representatives of business, industry and enterprise pointed to the increasing demands for high levels of literacy and numeracy in all sectors of employment. They emphasised the importance of raising standards to the levels achieved in the highest performing countries in order to continue to grow our indigenous knowledge economy and continue to attract high-value jobs through inward investment.
>
> (DES, 2011, 8)

"Neoliberalism has a definite view of education, understanding it as human capital formation" (Connell, 2013,104). That is human capital on an individual and national scale that consists of developing the skills and attitudes needed by a productive workforce to produce increasing profits for the market economy. It contradicted the principles of the Primary School Curriculum, introduced in 1999, which acknowledged the economic needs of the state but encapsulated a broader vision for education.

My tacit doubts about practice in Oakwood PS, that initiated this research, reflected the uncertainty and insecurity engendered in teachers through neoliberal competitive systems. It took time to recognise neoliberalism and its invasion into my evaluation of my core professional values about practice. Its recognition facilitated and in turn was facilitated by a gradually healing reflexivity.

Thesis Structure

Chapter 2 of this thesis comprises the literature review. The literature reviewed is of a historical nature. The need to explore the historical context emerged during analysis of second-person research findings. Themes that emerged during analysis suggested that forces other than neoliberalism influenced teachers' perspectives and practice. In particular, the themes of continuity and certainty in participants' practice perspectives showed a collective habitus that prompted a more thorough exploration of the historical antecedents of current educational policy and practice. I was unaware of the historical antecedents that framed a culture of disadvantage or conversely advantage in Irish primary education when I set out on this process. Identifying them revealed their legacy in practice today. The nature of action research requires such iterative reviews of literature as blind spots in one's

knowledge are revealed (Dick, 1993; Coghlan and Brannick, 2014) as the research process progresses.

Chapter 3 details the characteristics of action research. It then outlines the research design in which colleagues engaged in second- person action research in Oakwood PS. Chapter 4 reports the findings of the action research mainly through the voices and contributions of the participants. Both of these chapters report from a practice orientation prior to deeper reflexive engagement but they both also demonstrate the importance of the process of authentic research practice as one searches for deeper understanding.

The heart of the research process is contained in Chapter 5. Here the findings and process were analysed. At this juncture a deeper engagement with the historical aspects of habitus emerged as necessary. The ecological nature of practice became significant. An ecological approach implies that the present is temporally related to past practice and conditions. Building on Bourdieu's theories, Kemmis et al (2014) capture this ecological continuum in the concept of practice architectures. This deeper analysis took me from insular reflexivity confined to a prior practice orientation through emerging researcher reflexivity as I began to understand the influence of my individual habitus on my practice. Engagement with others in second-person research brought me to relational reflexivity, and an understanding of how the past relates to me and to practice in Irish primary schools, conceptualised as a cultural architecture.

The whole thesis is brought together in the discussion of findings in Chapter 6. Findings from engagement with colleagues in the core cycle of action research are discussed in relation to reflexive analysis of those findings and of the emergent literature which that analysis initiated. It synthesises the changes in practice that action research in Oakwood PS enabled with the themes which contributed to the conceptualisation of cultural architecture. It suggests that action research as an approach can contribute to the intersubjective awareness of teachers of the diverse cultural knowledge base of pupils in the school context as envisaged in the principles of the Primary School Curriculum.

Chapter 7 concludes this thesis with a reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of this research process. While it relates specifically to the context of Oakwood PS, it

has the potential to contribute to practitioners' better understanding of the cultural architecture that underpins practice and policy in Irish primary education.

Conclusion

This chapter set the context from which the action research project emerged. It stated that the contradiction experienced in my practice in Oakwood PS between the underpinning principles of the Primary School Curriculum and the intensified narrower focus on raising literacy and numeracy standards evident in national educational policy (DES, 2011) provided the impetus for the research. It outlined the transformative effect of engagement with Bourdieuian methodology and theory on my reflexive capacity to understand my formation in the Irish cultural context. It identified the neoliberal reform agenda underpinning recent education policy in Ireland. The research questions that originated from self-study were presented. It indicated that as the process of action research evolved, analysis of second-person findings deepened the inquiry into the historical, cultural, political and socio-economic antecedents of current teaching practice with specific reference to disadvantaged contexts in Ireland. The historical research uncovered a cultural architecture that prefigured the current neoliberal reform agenda in Irish primary education. This chapter suggests that the iterative process of action research facilitates self understanding in relation to the context of the research. It accords with the view that one cannot predict in advance what the process will reveal about oneself or one's context before the process of researching begins (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review outlines the historical construction in Irish education policy of 'educational disadvantage' and the subsequent effects on teachers and teaching practice. The review has evolved into a critical reflection - where critical is taken to recognise the position of the researcher, and where the researcher wants to deconstruct the taken-for-granted acceptance of their own view (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010). To contextualise educational disadvantage it is necessary to go beyond the term and review the literature in exploration of the interwoven structures and forces in society that have formed the present conceptualisation of 'educational disadvantage'. The concept is a product of both policy and practice. Policy is a form of practice, involving a process of coming into being. Therefore an ecological framework underpins this review. The central tenet of an ecological review suggests that practices which come into being in one space, shape or are shaped by the practices or practice architectures of another practice (Kemmis et al., 2014; Schatzki, 2012).

Practice architectures encapsulate the collective memory and reproduction of practice traditions. They exist in three dimensions parallel to the activities of the *sayings, doings* and *relatings* of a practice. The first is the dimension of semantic space in which the cultural-discursive arrangements which enable or constrain what can or cannot be said are found (sayings). The second is the dimension of physical space-time where the arrangements that enable or constrain how we do things in the medium of work and activity are located (doings). The final dimension of social space reveals the social-political arrangements that enable or constrain how people connect and contest with one another in the social medium of power and solidarity (relatings). These three kinds of arrangements 'hang together' in places, in practices, in human lives and traditions of various kinds (Kemmis et al., 2014, 32) Taking such an approach to this literature review assists in revealing the blueprint created in the past which contributed to the practice experienced by children and teachers today in Oakwood PS. The approach acknowledges that the present is built on the past, but the future is not predetermined (Freire, 1992; Freire, 1998; Grace, 1995; Kemmis et al., 2014).

There are six sections in this literature review, beginning with the historical account of Irish primary education since independence to delineate the unique characteristics of the Irish context. An exploration of culture follows which assists in revealing aspects of Irish education that are taken-for-granted as familiar rather than problematic. The third section focuses on the position of teachers in the Irish primary sector. An exploration of curriculum precedes the fifth section which examines the construction of 'disadvantage' in Irish educational discourse since the 1980s. The chapter concludes with an outline of the significance of this historical review to my reflexive understanding of my formation within the Irish cultural milieu that emerged during the process of action research.

Historical Background of Irish Primary Education

Ireland gained political independence from Britain in 1922, followed almost immediately with civil war erupting over the terms of independence. The six counties of Northern Ireland were partitioned from the thirty two counties. This thesis refers to the twenty six counties which comprised the new state. The predominant characteristics of this newly independent state were that it was overwhelmingly rural and Catholic. Fifty eight per cent of the male labour force at the time worked in agriculture. Most farmers were owner occupiers of their land, though there were major variations in farm size with fifty seven per cent of farms comprised of less than thirty acres and one tenth of one hundred acres or more (Tovey and Share, 2003, 53). The state's acknowledgement of the cherished rights of farming families and to their economic security on the land was outlined in Article 45.2.v of the Constitution (Government of Ireland, 1937). Initially ninety per cent of the population of the new state were of the Catholic religion, which rose gradually to ninety five per cent. The Catholic Church had emerged from the nationalist struggle with enhanced power and prestige in the new state, facilitated by the partition which removed the power other Churches may have exerted (Breen et al., 1990). In terms of education policy it has been suggested that there were three key eras post-independence in which particular policy change occurred, which have shaped the current school system in Ireland today, namely; 1922 to 1950s, the 1960s and the 1990s (Coolahan et al., 2017, vii). Each of these eras will be briefly discussed below to provide context for the following sections.

1922–1950s: Church and State in Education

In the decades following independence in 1922, there was an accepted perception that Irish people deeply valued education, possibly strengthened by accounts of defiant attendance at forbidden 'hedge schools'[1] in the 18th century (Raferty, 2009; Coolahan, 2011), and their enthusiastic engagement with the national school system established in 1831 (Coolahan, 1981). "Inspired by the ideology of cultural nationalism" (Coolahan,1981, 38) the state's initial aim in primary education was to revitalise the Irish language and increase awareness of Irish history with a view to developing a national sense of pride (Walsh et al., 2011). The ethos and management of the large network of primary schools that had been established under British rule was left entirely to the religious groups (Walsh et al., 2011; Coolahan, 2011), with the state assuming a subsidiary role in assisting the agencies of the churches in providing educational facilities (Coolahan, 1981,46).This position was reflected in the 1937 Constitution in which Article 42.4 stated that the state provided for free primary education (Government of Ireland,1937). The inclusion of the word 'for' directly related to its supporting role to providers of education and the rights afforded to them. Notwithstanding the contributions made by the churches to the provision of education over those decades, the full implications of this state policy is the almost complete monopoly which the Irish churches hold over Irish schooling, particularly at the primary level today (Irwin, 2015, 49; O'Toole, 2017). Given that the vast majority of the population were Catholic, hereafter in this thesis the Catholic Church will be referred to as the Church.

Moreover, Article 42 recognised parents as the primary educators of their children and afforded them the right and duty to provide "according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education" of their children. In this sense the rights and duties of parents and church were considered to be complementary (O'Sullivan 2005, 122), and in turn the state benefitted from respecting the "supernatural right of the Church over such Christian education" (Kavanagh,1956, 93). This belief is evident in the following excerpt from Reverend James Kavanagh's influential book 'The Manual of Social Ethics':

[1] During the era of the penal laws, from the late seventeenth century, when Catholics were forbidden from setting up schools or sending their children abroad for education, locally organised unofficial schools known as 'hedge schools' became common.

> Every true Catholic, trained in accordance with Catholic doctrine, is by that very fact found to be an excellent citizen, a sincere lover of his country, and a loyal and obedient subject under any legitimate form of government.
>
> (Kavanagh, 1956, 90)

Many reasons have been posited to explain why the Church took - and was allowed to take - such a tight hold on education following independence. A discussion on post-colonialism is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is necessary to identify it as a driver of the Church's power in the apparatus of the state (Freire, 1972). In the post-colonial condition of the newly independent state, loyalty to the Church can be understood through its long association with nationalism. Prior to independence the Church had symbolised its opposition to colonialism by its refusal to co-operate with the establishment of a non-denominational national education system proposed in 1831(Coolahan, 1981, 12). Coolahan points out that while the Presbyterian and Church of Ireland also opposed non-denominational education, the Catholic Church is more associated with the opposition. The Church succeeded in establishing denominational schooling and denominational training colleges for teachers, which the state inherited in 1922.

It could be argued that following independence, the distinction between Church and state became blurred and this blurring was mutually beneficial. The new state derived added authority from its close association with the Church, which was already an established pillar of Irish society. The Church in turn could expand its reach to areas not obviously within its domain. The implicit faith, obedience and loyalty of the people to their religion (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, 164) became entwined with loyalty to the state as Church and state appeared to act in harmony. Parents, the primary educators of their children according to the constitution, were facilitated to entrust the responsibility of educating their children to the Church, through the 'fides implicita', an unquestioning implicit faith, which Church doctrine had cultivated, as is common in many organised religions (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

1960s: The Economy and Education

The publication of *Investment in Education* in 1965 proved pivotal in changing attitudes as it revealed the shortcomings of a system stagnated by the "entrenched conservatism of political and educational elites for the previous generation" (Walsh,

2014, 121). The report marked a change in how the state understood provision particularly at second and third level and subsequently education policy was firmly linked to the economic needs of the state (Walsh et al., 2011; Loxley et al., 2014). Underpinned by the theory of human capital, that is the ability to perform labour in order to produce economic value, and the assumption of a direct causal connection between levels of educational attainment and economic growth, its influences are evident in educational thinking to the present (Loxley, 2014, 174).

Policy changes following *Investment in Education* did affect changes in a society where previously level of wealth was the main predictor of future position and economic status (Tovey and Share, 2003).The introduction of free second level education and school transport in 1967 opened up opportunities previously unavailable to a large cohort of the population to secure access to a favoured niche in the class system (Breen et al., 1990). While the needs of the economy and the needs of some individuals appeared aligned, the understanding of the nature and purpose of education initiated by *Investment in Education* and furthered by *Programme for Action in Education 1984-1987* have been described subsequently as 'troubling' (Walsh et al., 2011, 94). The underlying approach can be identified as one based on a theory of society which was both meritocratic and consensualist (Drudy, 1991, 107) which many suggest embody the characteristics which were to typify much of the ensuing work in sociology of Irish education and educational discourse generally (Drudy and Lynch, 1993; Drudy, 2009; Loxley et al. 2014; Tovey and Share, 2003; O Higgins-Norman, 2011; Breen, 2010; Walsh et al., 2011; O'Sullivan, 2005). O'Sullivan notes that ideas do not die - in other words, the set of policy prescriptions, originated in Catholic social teaching from the previous era, lived on in the consensual attitude that permeated the rise of competitive individualist emphases (O'Sullivan, 2005, 96).

1990s to Present: Legislation and Education

In 1998 the Education Act (1998) was published, following a period in which the most significant review of education in Ireland since the founding of the state occurred (Walsh et al., 2011, 102) through the social partnership framework initiated in 1987 (Lynch et al. 2012, 7).The Education Act formed the legislative framework for an agenda of change in Irish education (Coolahan, 2003) in an attempt to position education more firmly within the control of the state. The Act defined the key roles

and duties of the personnel and institutions involved in education. Premised on the interests of the common good, it aimed to provide education for every person in the state, underpinned by principles of inclusive recognition of the diverse needs, beliefs and traditions of all in society. It aimed to ensure the education system's accountability to students, their parents and the state while conducted in a spirit of partnership by those who serve, oversee and engage in the system (Ireland, 1998a). It specifically outlined new measures which were required to be put in place to achieve these aims, by the state, Department of Education (DES), Inspectorate, Boards of Management (BOMs) of schools, school staff and the various individuals within the system.

At state level the act initiated further statutory acts which governed specific aspects of education[2] relating to teaching standards, special education needs (SEN) and welfare issues including school attendance. It triggered the establishment of statutory bodies, under the aegis of the DES, such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), National Education Welfare Board (NEWB), National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the Teaching Council (TC) among others. The NCCA had preceded the Education Act as a non statutory body and had been engaged in revising the curricula during the 1990s. Following the 1998 act, the Minister for Education had more authority over the NCCA and was empowered to appoint additional personnel to it if required, as stated in section 40.2 "as the Minister considers appropriate" (Ireland, 1998a). The state had assumed substantial authority over educational matters through this legislative framework and while consultative processes regarding required changes were envisaged, ultimate authority rested with the Minister for Education.

The establishment of the additional statutory bodies allowed for a more strategic and focussed role for the Department of Education and the Inspectorate in contrast to the multi-tasked and diversified roles that had prevailed. The Inspectorate role was redefined as an evaluative and advisory one, on all aspects of the school system (Coolahan et al., 2017). BOMs of schools were responsible to ensure the implementation of the act in each school. Duties and responsibilities of BOMs were delineated in the act. BOMs were responsible to ensure the quality of teaching and

[2] Education (Welfare) Act 2000; Teaching Council Act 2001; Education for Persons with Special Educational; Needs Act (EPSEN) 2004; Teaching Council Amendment Act 2006.

learning in the school. The act had not altered the ownership of schools by denominational bodies, but had subsumed their management authority under the legislative framework. The sheer number of new statutory requirements posed significant challenges for the teaching profession (Coolahan, 2003) as the act comprehensively addressed every aspect of their teaching and administrative roles.

As the Education Act had defined the roles of each sector and actor within the system it followed that practitioners and schools were obliged to become more accountable and transparent in the operation. It did so without addressing critical issues about the values and judgements inherent in questions of accountability and responsibility, but did at least clarify what each party might expect from the other within the system (Walsh et al., 2011). It was framed for the common good and had emerged from years of consultation with the education stakeholders including parent, management, teaching, teacher union and business representatives. Some suggest that this consultative process had fostered a good degree of consensus and ownership of the new policy measures by the major actors in the system (Coolahan, 2003,1) whereas others posit that the consultative process concealed management complicity in the political project of establishing NPM reforms to centralise control of education (Lynch et al., 2012).

Initially the true significance of the Education Act may not have been perceived by the teaching profession in general or their representative unions. One union reported to its members that the Education Act "by and large reflected existing practices and procedures in operation in schools which will continue to apply after the implementation date" (McElduff and Sheehan, 2001, 9). NPM structures and technologies had slipped into the management and control of education in Ireland unbeknown to those involved in the process of negotiating improvements to the system (Lynch et al., 2012). While the specialisation of statutory bodies such as the NEWB, NCCA, NCSE and TC all contributed to the desired improvements within the system, their corresponding bureaucratic demands created additional demands of those in the system. Minimal changes in policy gradually accelerated. The acceleration could arguably be demonstrated in the publication of *The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020* (DES, 2011), which displayed the centralised control of the education

system by the state to serve neo-liberal market priorities reflecting "the global education reform movement" (Conway, 2013, 65).

Education policy always sits at the intersection of the past, present and future (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010; Kemmis et al., 2014). It has been argued policy decisions from the 1960s onwards that shaped the education system to meet the demands of the labour market, positioned it as susceptible to current neoliberal emphases (Loxley et al., 2014; Lynch et al., 2012; Walsh et al., 2011). The control exercised by the Church over Irish education through its ownership and control of schools and through the wider moral influence it cast over cultural, social and political life delayed the development of critical analysis of public policy over an extended period of time (Lynch et al., 2012, 10). As the Education Act did not address denominational ownership of schools, contradictory arrangements emerged when state priorities and Church teachings did not align. The specific context that has emerged creates a cultural milieu unique to Ireland (Irwin, 2015) and affects how education is practiced. It raises the issue of culture as a research theme, which is addressed in the next section.

Cultural Influences in Irish Education

"Education systems are not only a key symbol of culture, but also a key means of reproduction of that culture" (Menter, 2008, 58). In critique of policy construction in the Irish education system since the 1950s in such substantive areas as the connection between education and the economy, religion and equality, Denis O'Sullivan (2005) attributed the paucity of critical perspectives and weakness of theorisation in Irish educational studies to the absence of a conceptualisation of the role of culture in decision making processes. His analysis suggested that in the Irish experience, concepts of culture revolved around the areas of the Irish language, heritage and the arts rather than as a source for the study of meaning making and dissemination in Irish life. Existing references to the educational policy process presented it as conceptually and procedurally uncomplicated. O'Sullivan suggested this concealed the "power circuits in Irish education that routinely escape identification and naming" (O'Sullivan, 2005, xiii), exemplified in the range of questions which remain to be addressed. Among the issues unaddressed are that the 'taken-for-granted' realms of educational thought and practice remain uncontested, with consequences for the

meaning practitioners such as teachers derive from the policy process regarding their position and practice.

At a practice level it has been suggested that research of teachers' role in education requires examination of the broader cultures in which teachers work (Menter, 2008; Wilcox et al., 2004; Freire, 1998). In other words the links between national culture and teacher identity are an important area of study. Teachers are the knowledge workers who represent the system and who carry out the labour that leads to the (re-)creation of that culture (Menter, 2008, 58). The ambiguity associated with the concept of culture allows several interpretations, so it is necessary to explore its usage and delimit what exactly is encapsulated in it when it refers to teachers' work. In order to do this, it is necessary to deal with the concepts of culture and teacher identity separately, followed by the interrelations of both with the caveat that teachers' work is complex, variable and dynamic and that culture is interwoven in historical, political, social and economic forces.

What is Culture?

Culture - a word used in everyday language and also in academic discourse embraces a "range of topics, processes, differences and even paradoxes"(Jenks, 2005, 2), making it difficult to define or develop shared understanding. It conveys traditions and history from one generation to the next, yet every generation creates, contributes and mediates culture in response to or in contest of it. Though considered pervasive in the formation of societal and individual worldviews, "culture is not special, it is mundane and part of everybody's life" (Jenks, 2005, 92). It is that mundane aspect that conceals culture but also prioritises it for scientific inquiry (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), as it easily escapes attention and identification. Jenks's (2005) typology of four broad areas of usage of the concept is helpful when trying to identify culture and secondly, specify what aspects of it are relevant to this discussion relating to teachers' work.

The first area of the typology refers to a cerebral category which interprets culture as a general state of mind, which comes with the idea that culture cultivates personal development and wisdom through contact with the established body of knowledge that precedes it. In the second area, culture is seen as a collective category and relates to the state of the intellectual and or moral development of society, suggesting the

interrelated evolution of society and culture. Third, culture can be seen as an aesthetic category which relates to the art, literature, music and intellectual work within society. While this category can differentiate between standards of culture, it also relates to the ethnic or national expressions of identity through aesthetic forms. The fourth area is culture as a social category in which it is equated with the total way of life of a people. In this category, it has been used as a conceptual tool in different research disciplines including sociology, anthropology and cultural studies to conceptualise people's language, customs, values, religion, economic, social and political systems alongside their history and traditions (Jenks, 2005, 11)

It is culture as a social category which informs this study of primary school teachers' role in education in Ireland. As it is a broad category, a further distinction needs to be made between cultural objects and cultural forms to clarify the aspects of culture under consideration. Cultural objects are tangible objects, behaviours or sounds produced by human activity to include knowledge, skills, beliefs, art, morals, custom, law etc, that are vested with meaning for a particular social group (O'Sullivan, 2005, 9.) Handshakes are a simple example of cultural objects, as are fist bumps. Both are a tangible, physical gesture of greeting or agreement between persons in Irish society. Cultural forms on the other hand, are abstract constructs and not easily acknowledged as forms until they have been named. They refer to the structuring conventions that operate within a culture in relation to the meanings, associations, images, connotations and definitions which invest cultural objects with their significance. Cultural forms assign cultural objects an invisible yet palpable label which designates them conservative, religious, fashionable, etc, depending on the worldview of the assigner. Cultural forms do not exist in a temporal, social or political vacuum. To have influence over the structuring of cultural forms is to have the capacity to advance one's worldview and to shape the self-definition of others (O'Sullivan, 2005, 9), with the seemingly collective agreement on the interpretation of cultural objects.

Interpretation of cultural objects is influenced by the prevailing cultural forms. Perception of cultural forms is complicated as perception itself is limited by culture and highlights the difficulty of being of a culture while trying to understand that culture. O'Sullivan suggests that unexamined cultural forms contribute to an unquestioning, conformist attitude among people. Secondly, Jenks (2005) suggests

that at an analytical level the real difference at work between different interpretations is one between evaluation and description. Culture is a concept that fulfils either one of these tasks (Jenks, 2005, 5). Returning to the example of handshakes and fist bumps, both can be described as gestures which imply similar meanings but one is evaluated as acceptable and appropriate while the other is not within sections in the Irish cultural framework. On the other hand both are considered inappropriate in some other cultures. Moreover, the evaluative task of cultural interpretation is frequently applied as a concept of differentiation within society. Subcultures demarcate special or different interests of groups of people within society who either expressly demonstrate alternative cultural behaviour (Jenks, 2005, 10), or who are evaluated as different from that which cultural forms have designated as appropriate. Applying this framework to primary school education it appears that the distinctions between cultural objects and forms can be detected in the taken-for-granted structure of the school system in Ireland today.

Categories of Primary Schools in Ireland

Tangible cultural objects within Irish primary education are the physical and institutional constructs of schools. Primary schools within the system vary due to geographical location and population density, but also due to the traditional religious denominational management structure, which predates the state (Coolahan, 1981). 100% of Irish primary schools were denominational until the late 1970s, which has reduced to 96% (Irwin, 2015). Parental choice led to the establishment of multi-denominational primary education in Ireland in the late 1970s with the opening of the Dalkey School Project (Hyland, 1996); the first of the Educate Together schools; against significant state opposition (Irwin, 2015). State opposition to multi-denominational education has changed since 2008, when the unavailability of school places for a significant number of 'non Catholic' children in west Dublin, highlighted the need for the education system to respond to needs of a changing society (Irwin, 2015). Community national schools were the first state multi-denominational schools established at primary level, which currently comprise of eleven schools in total (Conboy, 2017). Parents also established Gaelscoileanna, which are primary schools that use total immersion in Irish language as the means of instruction and communication during the school day. Schools other than gaelscoileanna use varying levels of Irish language throughout the day but mainly operate through the medium

of English language. Educate Together and Gaelscoileanna have established their subculture status within the primary school system by emphasising their interest in providing an alternative choice to state provision. The capacity to do so displays their influential structuring of cultural forms to shape their self-definition.

On the other hand some schools are categorised as disadvantaged, generally based on the socio-economic background of the pupils enrolled in them and on the disparity in educational achievement of children in these schools compared with children from other socio-economic backgrounds. Rather than establish their identity as an alternative to the system, these schools are evaluated as different from what cultural forms have designated as normal. Despite considerable research (Drudy and Lynch, 1993; Conaty, 2002; Cregan, 2008; Deegan et al, 2004; Zappone, 2007) and state intervention the disparity persists and has become part of the familiar accepted way of life (O'Sullivan, 2005). The terminology used to describe those who attend these schools emphasise the deficits in their situation and range from 'marginalised' and 'underprivileged' to 'disadvantaged', the latter of which was most commonly used in Irish educational discourse (Kellaghan, 2002) until DEIS[3] became synonymous with disadvantage and both are now used interchangeably. It has been argued that such deficit labelling masks systemic inadequacies, or inquiry into established systems and instead the failure of those who are disadvantaged is attributed to their perceived deficits (Bourdieu, 1993; Reay, 1998; O'Sullivan, 2005; Lawler, 2005). Whereas disadvantaged schools are cultural objects, it is the implicit individual and societal evaluations inherent in the cultural form of disadvantage that is relevant to this discussion. As O'Sullivan points out however, it is rarely discussed as it is part of the mundane taken-for-granted accepted realities of Irish education.

Teachers as a group are not immune to the interpretative and evaluative power of culture, and are influenced by the norms and values prevalent in society at large (Devine, 2005, 52). The 'teacher' is also a cultural object subject to the influential interpretation of the cultural forms prevalent in society of which they are participants. The difficulty individuals encounter in understanding at a conscious level the sources and consequences of their perspectives (Wilcox et al., 2004;

[3] The word 'deis' translates as 'opportunity' in the English language. DEIS is an acronym for the DES intervention: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools.

Brookfield, 1995) directs attention to the positioning of primary school teachers by themselves and others, in the Irish primary school system.

Primary School Teachers in the Irish System

> There are not major concerns in Ireland about attracting competent people to enter the teaching profession. Teaching as a career has traditionally enjoyed high social status and there is keen competitiveness for entry to all categories of teaching.
>
> (Coolahan, 2003, 21)

As the opening quote suggests, primary school teaching is considered an attractive career in Ireland as evidenced in the annual demand for places in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) colleges (McGuire, 2014; Darmody and Smyth, 2016). It has been noted that primary school teachers in Ireland come from less diverse backgrounds than in other European countries (Drudy and Lynch, 1993; Darmody and Smyth, 2016) and rarely from low socio-economic groups (Coolahan, 2003; Darmody and Smyth, 2016). They have been described as "white, middle-class, catholic and female" (Leavy, 2005,174).

Arguably these current features of the profession are underpinned by both historical and cultural conditions which relate to the previous two sections of this review. The policy of the Irish government following independence had direct implications for teachers' work. This section relates the policy emphases of nationalism, human capital theory and NPM in the three distinct eras of post-independence, the 1960s and the 1990s to the structuring of the primary school teaching profession in Ireland today.

Language Requirements for Primary School Teachers

The unique position of the Irish language in primary school teaching is directly related to the policy of the Irish government following independence, which had and continues to have direct implications for teachers' work. Through his historical account Coolahan (1981) details how the central position afforded to the Irish language as a medium of instruction presented a daunting task for the majority of primary school teachers at that time. Less than ten per cent of the twelve thousand lay[4] teachers were competent in the language. Serving teachers were encouraged to

[4] The word used to describe teachers who were not members of a religious order.

attend summer courses to acquire mastery of it. Positive evaluations of their work by inspectors depended on good performance in teaching through the medium of Irish.

To increase the number of potential fluent Irish speaking teachers, state-funded second level boarding schools were opened in 1926 in which students were immersed in an atmosphere of national heritage entirely conducted through the Irish language. Known as preparatory colleges, they prepared students to start tertiary education with a command of the language. Managed by the church authorities, they existed until 1961. Places were reserved for students who had a good command of spoken Irish and for students from Gaeltacht[5] areas. In turn all students wishing to gain entrance to teacher training college had to demonstrate fluency in the Irish language as a pre-condition of acceptance. From 1931 entrants were selected on the basis of their Leaving Certificate results and on their successful oral Irish exam.

Currently entrants to primary school ITE courses must have achieved an honours grade in the Leaving Certificate in Irish, which has the status of being the first official language of Ireland, in order to be accepted into the course. Second level ITE does not require higher level Irish apart from those intending to teach the language. Students who engage in primary ITE abroad are required to pass an Irish language exam before they are allowed to register as qualified to teach in a primary school (Teaching Council, 2017, 18). Findings suggest this policy suits females rather than males as there are marked gender differences with secondary school girls more likely to take higher level Irish language than boys. In addition many secondary schools in disadvantaged areas do not offer higher level Irish as an option for study (Darmody and Smyth, 2016, 81-88). It is argued that proficiency in the Irish language could be justified as a requirement at the end of an ITE course but as it stands it presents a barrier to diversity in the teaching profession in Ireland today (Gilligan, 2007, 44).

Farming Advantages since the 1960s

Changes in the second significant era of education policy during the 1960s appear to have suited the farming community. There are historical "ideological and cultural" (O'Hara, 1998, 1) associations distinctive to Irish society inherent in the notion of the farming community, comprised of a diversity of farm size, land quality and location

[5] Gaeltacht areas in Ireland are places where the Irish language is used as the primary language of communication.

in the country. Farming along the west coast and environs was one of subsistence on small, owner occupied holdings. The patriarchal nature of inheritance by the eldest son meant other siblings were destined to find livelihoods elsewhere, often through emigration.

While the opportunities presented by free transport to free second level education, following *Investment in Education* (1965), were not confined to the farming community, the exponential increase in the number of farming children who completed second level education after 1967 is noteworthy. By the early 1980's over two thirds of farmers' children did so, compared to little over half this for the children of the urban working class (Tovey and Share, 2003; O'Hara, 1998). By the 1990's farm[6] children had the highest rate of participation in Institutes of Technology and the second highest rate in Universities (Tovey and Share, 2003). It was also noted that the proportion of farm daughters who accessed tertiary education was particularly high "as farm families make exceptional efforts to educate their daughters"(O'Hara, 1998, 139). The increased participation in education corresponded with a decrease in the percentage of the labour force involved in farming from 30% in 1966 to 4% in 2011 (Loxley et al., 2014) as technological advances and market forces affected changes in agricultural practices. Access to education reduced the potential unemployment the decrease in the farm labour requirements would have created as farm children were well positioned to secure an off-farm livelihood. Alternatively, education could be viewed as an escape route from the meagre economic existence associated with small farm holdings.

The striking feature from this historical data is that low levels of educational participation in poorer farming families were comparable with urban working class families in 1961, while in the subsequent decades the participation gap developed. It could be argued through a functionalist analysis that farming families used the education system to equip their children with the skills required to function within a society (Gray and O'Carroll, 2012, 15). It has also been suggested that their facility with form filling and bureaucratic procedures associated with EU and state aid for farming equipped them to avail of grant-aid for third level education (O'Hara, 1998). Whether or not it could also be assumed that the cultural affection for farming in

[6] Farm is term used by O' Hara to categorise children of farmers, in her qualitative study of the farming community.

Irish society was reflected in the curriculum farming children experienced in school, it became a taken-for-granted view that one's ability and performance would be rewarded through participation in education. This view was compatible with human capital theory - widely held and espoused among politicians and state officials - that education was vital for the needs of the economy (Loxley et al., 2014).

These trends have been reflected in primary school teaching; since the 1970's over 80% of teachers come from farming and professional or white collar backgrounds (Drudy and Lynch, 1993). One quarter of primary ITE entrants were identified as coming from farm families, while three quarters of ITE entrants "have fathers in the farm, employer/manager groups or professional groups" (Darmody and Smyth, 2016, 102) indicating the trend continues to the present. Darmody and Smyth have noted with advised caution that the trend includes "the pursuit of a teaching career among those whose mothers are themselves teachers" (Darmody and Smyth, 2016, 102).

Some would argue that teachers' social class background is irrelevant when we consider their practice. Drudy, through a Marxist perspective, posits the opposite when suggesting that teachers may have a:

> class interest in the maintenance of the existing middle class domination of the education system, since they themselves are very much part of the property less class whose power and influence are contingent on maintaining traditional hierarchical distinctions between mental and manual labour
>
> (Drudy and Lynch, 1993, 95)

The theoretical resources of Marxism to distinguish the relationships between the realities of class structures do not appear effective in an initial analysis of Irish education. The Irish tendency of not referring to class (Allen, 2000; O'Sullivan, 2005, 307; Tovey and Share, 2003, 107) obscures the mechanisms of divisions and relations. Irish society was "often represented as a society of communities rather than class"(Tovey and Share, 2003, 114), presenting a system reflective of egalitarianism rather than hierarchical or preferential classification. It has been argued that the descriptive social democratic rhetoric used belies the policy and practice inherent in social classification in Ireland (Lynch et al, 2012; O'Toole, 2017). Possibly it contributed to the widespread acceptance among those who benefitted from policies

in the 1960's that their success was due to their ability to avail of opportunities and was deserved on merit (Kennedy and Power, 2010).

This is not to suggest that those who choose a teaching career only do so for utilitarian reasons; while difficult to generalise why people choose a teaching career existing research points towards a combination of extrinsic, intrinsic and altruistic motives (Darmody and Smyth, 2016, 14). Intrinsic motivation arises from a desire to engage with a profession due to its inherent interest, for self-fulfilment, personal experience, growth and enjoyment. Altruistic motivation arises from a wish to contribute to the growth of another individual and make a positive difference to their lives. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, reflects motivation to perform and succeed for the sake of accomplishing a specific result or outcome. In terms of the teaching profession, extrinsic motives include salary, working hours, holidays and job security and status (Chong and Low, 2009). Bastick (2000, 346) has shown that extrinsic motivations, related to job security and economic necessity are most evident in developing countries, combined with altruistic reasons of service to the state and society. In such societies the lack of alternative employment makes teaching a secure option. In metropolitan societies intrinsic and altruistic motivations for a teaching career are more prevalent among students who have alternative options, often with more attractive salary and prospects.

The meaning attributed to motivation descriptors is not uniform across research reports. In some studies intrinsic motivation refers to the desire to work with children. That same desire is categorised as altruistic in other reports (Richardson et al., 2014). To identify common core motivators despite different personal and career histories, Richardson and Watt developed the Factors Influencing Teaching Choice framework (FIT-Choice) in 2007. The framework was designed to discern the altruistic-type motivations together with more personally and socially utilitarian, intrinsic and ability-related teaching choice motivations. It accounted for antecedent social influences. The framework enabled comparisons of teacher motivations in various countries. While the comparisons show common core teacher motivations it also indicates that context does make a difference to the prominence of individualistic, collectivist or personally utilitarian motivations. More relevant to this exploration of Irish primary teachers, it found that initial motivations had a direct correspondence on teachers' career satisfaction. Strong social persuasion had a

negative effect on subsequent experiences. In addition, those with the most idealistic motivations were associated with reduced career choice satisfaction and self efficacies (Richardson et al., 2014, 12).

While primary teaching has continued to be a highly regarded career option in Ireland, this review indicates that a sizeable proportion of teachers come from a demographic that is not reflective of the diverse, multicultural and socioeconomic population they may teach. Furthermore research indicates that teachers' own experience as children, their autobiographical lens, has a major influence on how and what they teach (Stigler and Hiebert, 1999). If teachers are motivated by their early socialisation experience of schooling to join the profession they may encounter challenges if the experience of teaching does not match those expectations. As Irish society has undergone rapid change in the last two decades due to multicultural inward migration and subsequent acceleration of social change since the 2008 recession, changed classroom experience is to be expected. And yet this changing society is not reflected in the unique context of denominational education in Ireland which presents teachers with additional considerations as they negotiate their daily practice in Irish classrooms.

Denominational Context

The denominational context in which the vast majority of Irish primary teachers were educated and in which they subsequently work is unique in a European context. In Ireland denominational schools are the norm, whereas elsewhere in Europe a far more significant number of state primary schools are either multidenominational or nondenominational (Irwin, 2015; O'Toole, 2015; Coolahan et al., 2012). Denominational education aims as a matter of policy to foster in young people a commitment to a particular religion (Irwin, 2015). Predating the state the particular strain of denomination in Catholic schools was one of a paternalistic nature in which rule following predominated (Norman, 2003; Inglis, 1998; Kavanagh, 1956) contributing to the "understanding people had of themselves, their hopes, their felt needs and desires, their interpretation of what it was to be a good person" (Inglis, 1998, 253). Following Bourdieu's sociological theory, Inglis (1998) frames this way of being as Catholic habitus, which permeated family life, work, leisure and education. That teachers acquired this Catholic habitus is evidenced in recent times by the fact that teachers perceived no difficulties for children of other or no religions

who are required in many schools to remain in the classroom as the daily Catholic religion lesson is taught (O'Toole, 2015; Coolahan et al., 2012, 82), or that Catholic symbolism punctuates the school day (Daly, 2009).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to detail the various groups and organisations on a national and international level that have highlighted the rights of children and their parents in all geographical locations in Ireland to access a state provided education free from denominational control, a call that has accelerated and intensified since the 1990s. While government acknowledged the need for diverse provision, the hegemonic denominational education system was strengthened in the Education Act (1998a) when considerable powers were bestowed on the school patron to safeguard the

> characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school
>
> (Ireland, 1998a, section 15.2(b))

In that same year section 37 of the Employment Equality Act (1998) legislated that patrons of all denominational schools be allowed to "take action...to prevent an employee.... from undermining the religious ethos of the school" (Ireland, 1998b). In addition it would not be deemed discriminatory if criteria for employment favoured applicants of their religious orientation over those of other orientations.

Teachers working in state denominational schools may find themselves in a vulnerable position should they favour a pluralist approach to education at a time when the population they teach is no longer homogenous. Irwin (2015) suggests this situation prolongs the 'culture of silence' already established among teachers through Catholic habitus of earlier eras when teachers did not challenge the status quo in Catholic schools (Norman, 2003, 21). Indeed it was noted in the Report of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector that "non-theist student teachers may have to engage in dissimulation practices if they are to ensure a teaching appointment" (Coolahan et al., 2012, 99).

The aforementioned Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector was established in 2011 in response to unavailability of school places for non-Catholic children in Dublin. The call for nationwide non-denominational education and

international criticism of the predominately denominational primary school provision in Ireland were also influential in its establishment. It undertook its work with the expressed willingness of the Catholic Church to consider divesting patronage of primary schools (Coolahan et al., 2012, 4). Through extensive consultation with stakeholders in education it deemed that parental choice would decide if patronage change was desired. It has been argued that such an approach favours the dominant denomination as there is not a critical mass of minority groups throughout the country to affect change (O'Toole, 2015, 95).

In 2015 the Catholic Church launched *The Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* to "provide a new impetus for the religious education and faith formation of Catholic children in Ireland in the twenty-first century"(Irish Episcopal Conference, 2015, 8). In its introduction it references the obligations of patrons to meet the requirements of the Education Act (1998) to promote the religious development of students in consultation with their parents having regard for the characteristic spirit of the school. It suggests that teachers should be mindful of their duty to educate in the distinctive beliefs, values and practices of the Catholic community. Where children of other faiths or none are concerned, teachers "will bear witness to an attitude of respect and appreciation for all" (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2015, 15).The combination of traditional denominational power in education and more recent legislation appear to contradict the emphases of the educational policies which call for inclusive pluralist education. Social commentators who acknowledge that while the Catholic "faith is still part of Irish culture, the Catholic 'nation' is no more" (O'Toole, 2017) are not reflecting the current situation in the majority of Irish primary schools for teachers and pupils. Moreover, NPM which centralised power in the education system with the Minister of Education did not address the control of schools by denominational bodies. Teachers are positioned in the liminal and often contradictory space between two authorities, exemplified in the current curricula battles between Church and state.

Curriculum

The use of the word curriculum is often equated with the word syllabus, limiting it to the consideration of the content or body of knowledge to be transmitted or list of subjects to be taught (Kelly, 2009, 9), while conceptually "it is much more than

syllabus, it is a response to culture, the past and the future" (Alexander, 2010, 3). Kelly (2009) advises that an exploration of the effects of any conception of curriculum has or is intended to have on recipients, is necessary in order to understand the term curriculum as the overall rationale for any educational programme. With such an understanding, a definition of curriculum refers to the totality of the experiences a pupil has as result of the provision made (Kelly, 2009, 13). Such a definition needs to embrace four major dimensions of educational planning and practice - the intentions of the planners; the procedures adopted for the implementation of those intentions; the actual experiences of the pupils resulting from the teachers' direct attempts to carry out their or other planners' intentions, and the 'hidden' learning that occurs as a by-product of the organisation of the curriculum and indeed the school (Kelly, 2009, 13), emphasising the notion that the curriculum as planned may not equate to the curriculum as lived (Aoki, 1993; Elliott, 1998).

These four dimensions raise the urgency of distinguishing between education and schooling (Kemmis et al. 2014, 26) and the role curriculum serves in clarifying or obscuring the distinction. Education refers to those activities which bring about worthwhile learning, contributing to personal and social growth. On the side of the individual, it concerns the formation of persons; on the side of the social, it concerns the formation of communities and societies, pointing to the purpose of education as "preparing people to live well in a world worth living in" (Kemmis et al. 2014, 27) It is therefore difficult to distinguish what type of activities are educational without addressing the qualities that contribute to a worthwhile life (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1972; Pring, 2004; Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Pinar, 2012). Education is organised and sustained in society by the institution of schooling and, therefore, is always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness and competitiveness of schooling as an institution (Carr and Kemmis 1986, 196). The permanent tension between education and schooling requires a critical vigilance about the extent to which schooling is undermining rather than sustaining the values definitive of education. Absence of such vigilance by those involved in education has allowed schooling to emerge as a malleable instrument of the political state to socialise the young (Hamilton, 2013; Freire, 1974). The curriculum has developed in a manner which provides elements and mechanisms for directing and controlling the activity of schooling (Goodson, 1988), with consequences for the work of teaching and teachers as well as the

intended recipients. It is acknowledged that teachers have a "make or break" role in all curricular activities (Kelly 2009, 13), though it could be equally argued that curriculum emphases have a similar effect on teachers' understanding of educational practice.

The Greek distinction between the dispositions of *techne* and *praxis* reflects the motives and attitudes that inform the two major styles of thought pervading education, curriculum and teaching (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Biesta, 2013; Gleeson, 2009). Techne is concerned with the quality of the product and is external to the producer. The kind of knowledge appropriate to the disposition of techne was what Aristotle called *poietike,* which roughly translates as 'making action' and which is evident in craft or skill knowledge (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, 32). One who works from the disposition of techne acts in a true and reasoned way according to the rules of the craft, and has a clear image of what is to be produced. Carr and Kemmis associate techne with means-end, technical or instrumental reasoning. Phronesis and its associated action praxis, have the moral purpose of bringing about the self-development of each individual learner for personal and the collective common good (Gleeson, 2009). While praxis is understood as action that aims for the good of those involved and the good of human kind, it can also be understood as history making action, that is action with moral, social and political consequences (Kemmis et al., 2014, 26). Phronesis depends on a dialectical mode of thinking which requires reflection on

> elements like *part* and *whole, knowledge* and *action, process* and *product, subject* and *object, being* and *becoming, rhetoric* and *reality,* or *structure* and *function*
>
> (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, 33)

It is a dynamic mode which searches for new constructive thinking to exceed the contradictory state of affairs. *Praxis* is informed action which, by reflection on its character and consequences, reflexively changes the 'knowledge-base' which informs it (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). Just as techne is associated with judgements related to making, praxis is associated with judgements related with doing (Elliott, 2015, 6). How the curriculum is viewed reflects ones interpretation of schooling and education and depends on whether one sees ones role as that of techne or praxis (Gleeson, 2009).

Irish Primary Curriculum

Gleeson (2009) suggests that praxis has received little attention in curriculum matters in Irish education generally and is critical of the prevalent technocratic tradition which tends to perpetuate myths of curriculum neutrality and ignores questions about the nature of knowledge, treating it as objective and transmittable to students (Gleeson, 2009). A review of past curriculum traditions has much to offer regarding current curriculum discourse and practice (Walsh, 2016) and teachers' subjective understanding of curriculum practice (Pinar, 2012). Moreover it demonstrates the continuity of patterns of curriculum control which can be obscured by preoccupation with current curricular restructuring (Goodson, 1988).

The socio-cultural influences of the three distinct eras of education policy since independence are reflected in the corresponding curricular emphases. The theocratic curriculum (O'Sullivan, 2005) framed in 1922 was influenced by the Catholic Church and nationalist ideals as opposed to pedagogical or educational approaches. It prioritised national as opposed to individual interests, and consequently, the content was not based directly on the needs, interests or abilities of the child (Walsh, 2016) or teachers. It was implemented without due attention to the Irish language competencies of teachers, subsequently placing many of them in vulnerable positions as they strove to acquire the language skills required.

The influence of human capital theory following *Investment in Education* (1965) is reflected in the child-centred curriculum of 1971. Planned by the Inspectorate, it was presented for implementation by teachers, without adequate articulation of its underpinning principles (Walsh, 2016, 8). The subsequent implementation difficulties were partly attributed to this inadequacy. While there was broad support from teachers for the curriculum there was a dichotomy between their endorsement in theory and their implementation in practice (Walsh, 2016; Gleeson, 2009), reflecting the weakness of the technical approach taken.

Following publication of the Education Act (1998), which paved the way for an era of significant change in Irish education, the curriculum was revised and the Primary School Curriculum was launched in 1999. In an attempt to transcend the

shortcomings of its predecessor, extensive consultations with education stakeholders including teacher representatives had accompanied its planning.

It built on and articulated the implicit principles of the previous version into seventeen explicit principles which pertained to the child, the child's learning and the child's interaction with others and the environment, drawing on constructivist approaches to learning and assessment. It emphasised its flexible nature to meet the needs and interests of individual schools granting the teachers the professional responsibility to make the required informed decisions (DES, 1999). The apparent praxis role required of teachers in this principle led curriculum was contradicted by the technical implementation phase. Key methodologies and exemplars of practice were provided for all eleven subjects, which were grouped into the six areas of language, mathematics, physical education, the arts, social, environmental and scientific education (SESE) and social, personal and health education (SPHE). Time was allocated for religious education, the nature of which related to the ethos of the particular school. Implementation was phased over a number of years, with training delivered nationwide to all primary teachers introducing the principles, aims, content objectives and teaching methodologies of each subject in the curriculum. The subsequent sense of overload teachers reported (Murchan et al., 2005; NCCA, 2010), along with inspectors' reports which indicated difficulties some teachers and schools were experiencing with its implementation (DESI, 2005, 55), were contrary to expectations and indeed to the general goodwill of teachers which had greeted the launch in 1999. Praxis suffered under technical control.

The dominant conceptualisation of curriculum as the product of a technical planning process, which selects and organises the subject matter for a programme of study appeals to policy makers (Looney, 2014; Elliott, 2015; Pinar, 2012), as a controlled and controllable endeavour in which to influence the purpose, priorities and outcomes of the education system. Tyler (1949) is associated with this conception of curriculum, which is encapsulated in terms of four fundamental questions which must be considered in the development of any curriculum. The questions related to identifying the purposes which a school should seek to attain; what educational experiences could be provided to attain these purposes; how those experiences could be effectively organised and finally how to determine if those purposes were attained (Tyler, 2013,1). While responses to those questions depended on the purposes

identified and could have been interpreted from either a techne or praxis perspective, Tyler's rationale was compatible with the modernist, scientific managerialist mentality of society and education which aimed to control the means and outcomes of education (Cohen et al., 2011, 36). This notion of curriculum has been critiqued as ideologically contestable as the implicit power and value judgements implicit in knowledge selection for inclusion in it are ignored. Secondly it emphasises the product of education over the process, particularly when the focus of evaluation is on product or outcomes measured through standardised approaches. It also dichotomises theory and practice into planning and implementation phases which contributes to the belief that curriculum as planned becomes enacted through the work of teachers ignoring the inherent diversity of contexts, people and interpretations (Aoki, 1993; Freire, 1998; Pinar, 2012). Elliot suggests that phases of planning, presentation and implementation contribute to the mismatch of curriculum intentions and curriculum experience. Such phases suggest that the "teachers' role is one of conforming their practice to a set of external curricular requirements or plans" (Elliott 1998, 23). It implies the curriculum is designed for teachers to follow.

Ted Aoki, a Canadian educationalist who specialised in curriculum studies from the 1970s proposed an alternative view to implementation, one grounded in the human experience of a particular classroom, in relationship with the students there, where the situational praxis of teachers replaced implementation (Pinar and Irwin, 2005, 5). In Aoki's view the notion that teachers implemented a curriculum planned elsewhere reduced them to technical beings, devoid of their subjectivities (Pinar and Irwin, 2005, 3). In such a technical view, implementation was the moment of application, of theory into practice, which Aoki challenged. He understood teaching as in-dwelling between two curriculum worlds - the first of these worlds is the curriculum-as-plan, the origin of which is outside the classroom. The other curriculum world is the situated world; the curriculum-as-lived by the teacher and pupils (Aoki, 1993). The space between both is a philosophy he uses to legitimise the tension between both worlds (Olson, 2012). The curriculum-as-plan frames a set of curriculum statements and recommendations for the teacher, while the lived curriculum deals with the multiplicity of interests, personalities and humanness of the classroom situation. It acknowledges the subjectivity of both teacher and pupils and the role of judgement in the teaching and learning process.

In summary, while the 1999 curriculum was presented as a framework from which to cater for the needs of children, it was the positioning of teachers in the catering for those needs that was at issue. The implicit assumption central to the curriculum implied that teachers would make judgements regarding the appropriate content and methodologies they evaluated as suitable for the specific context and their specific children. That message was lost in translation as teachers were trained in curriculum subjects as separate disciplines of knowledge, unrelated to the daily complexities and realities of classrooms or tailored to each school context (Kennedy, 2013; Loxley et al, 2007). The mode of implementation facilitated the continuity of the technical reductionist view of curriculum, already established in Ireland (Walsh, 2016), but contrary to the explicit principles which envisaged a social construction.

It could be argued that the current revision of the curriculum which is outcomes focussed (DES, 2016) continues the technical approach to curriculum reinforced by the narrow focus on literacy and numeracy standards as required in *The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020* (DES, 2011). The addition of *The Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* takes a similar approach.

The Construction of Educational Disadvantage

Whereas the previous four sections in this review have sought to identify the political, social and cultural features of Irish primary education through a historical lens, this section specifically explores the construction of 'educational disadvantage' in Ireland. The review has suggested that the primary school system has struggled to emerge as responsive to local contexts under the originally compatible but increasingly dichotomous dual control of state and Church. The subsequent effects on the teachers have been outlined, along with the systematic hegemonic acceptance of human capital and meritocratic ideology. Adopting the same three significant eras of Irish education policy change as in previous sections of this review, it is possible to identify the construction of educational disadvantage in Ireland. It will become evident that little has changed in socio-cultural and political thinking in the intervening years.

Initially the state considered the education system as a conduit for nationalistic ideals. "Irish language and Catholic religion were the main characteristics of this

distinct identity" (Walsh, 2016, 5), despite the parental preference for acquisition of English language, as since the mid 1800s it was the language needed for trade and emigration (Coolahan, 1981, 7). Coolahan (1981) reports the lack of attention given to establishing a theoretical framework or a curricular philosophy which would guide new programmes. All schools, urban and rural alike, followed the same common curriculum. If diversity existed, it was not addressed in the main education system. Industrial schools acted as an overflow for students who did not or could not comply with the narrow school focus (*Department of Education,* 1936, 234-238, *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse,* 2009; Kennedy, 1970).

Emergence of Disadvantage

In the second era of the 1960s *Investment in Education* (1965) sharply critiqued the scale of inequality in participation associated with socio-economic and regional disparities along with the underfunded provision for primary schools. As stated previously, the policy focus following this report concentrated on expansion of second level education and has been attributed as the source of human capital emphases in Irish education. It was not until the 1980's; during an economic recession when unemployment rates soared, that these issues were acknowledged in the *Programme for Action in Education 1984-1987*. It stated that educational provision should discriminate positively in favour of the disadvantaged. This aspiration was included in an overall framework that strengthened the notion that education's purpose was linked to economic prosperity (Walsh et al., 2011; Drudy, 2009; Loxley et al., 2014; Tovey and Share, 2003). The programme omitted a definition or an articulation of who were disadvantaged, or by what criteria they were considered disadvantaged or indeed what factors had contributed to their disadvantage.

The Department of Education and Skills' documentation demonstrates that action on educational disadvantage featured in 1984 with the introduction of the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme in selected urban areas. It continued to be a policy feature between 1984 and 2001, with the introduction of multiple intervention initiatives[7] which variously focussed on involving parents in their children's

[7] Educational Disadvantage Schemes: Disadvantaged Areas Scheme (DAS) 1984 ; Home School Community Liaison (HSCL)1990; Early Start 1994/95; Breaking the Cycle 1996/97; Giving Children an Even Break (GCEB) 2001.

education, extending preschool duration to prepare children for learning in school and increased financial resources to schools. It was acknowledged that these initiatives had some positive impact on schools in terms of the overall quality of provision but concerns were raised that the complexity and diversity of issues encompassed in the term 'educational disadvantage' were not adequately addressed through this interventionist approach (Mac Ruairc, 2009; Kellaghan, 2002).

That interventionist approach was also challenged in O'Sullivan's (2005) critique which posited that it prevented a thorough exploration of what was meant by the term 'educational disadvantage'. The absence of discourse on the inherent complexities went unrecognised as the focus and energy moved to the mechanisms of intervention. Rather than conduct research and develop an in-depth understanding of all facets of educational disadvantage in Ireland, O'Sullivan described the broad but shallow discourse that developed as 'pastiche'. In literary terms pastiche refers to a work composed from elements borrowed from various other authors, and may be applied in complimentary, derogatory or more neutral ways (Allen, 2011). O'Sullivan used it here to suggest that there was potential to investigate the concept of disadvantage but that potential was not realised as successive waves of interventions were prioritised, which pacified activist tendencies. On the other hand, policy can be expressed in silence as non-decision-making is as much an expression of policy as are the actual decisions made, evident when things stay the same or are not discussed (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010, 4). The fundamental question of what contributed to and maintained a situation in which certain cohorts of children continued to be disadvantaged within the educational system remained unexplored.

The third era identified as significant in Irish education policy culminated in the publication of the Education Act (1998). Three major approaches to 'educational disadvantage' can be located in the act, namely, definition, research and technical control.

A Legislative Response to Educational Disadvantage

Educational disadvantage was defined in the Education Act (1998) as:

> The impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools
>
> (Government of Ireland, 1998)

A definition is usually a starting point when one wants to gain knowledge and understanding about official policy on an issue. However it is difficult to clarify what the definition of disadvantage quoted above means, as it can be interpreted in various ways depending on one's position and perspective especially on such matters as the purpose one ascribes to education and what level of benefit is considered appropriate. Neither matter is addressed in the act. The meaning of disadvantage is separated from the political and social interests embedded in its production. Ideological and hegemonic perspectives remain obscured. It performs a function of appearing to mean something to everyone. It is therefore difficult to challenge and does little to advance the discourse from that of earlier decades (O'Sullivan, 2005). O'Sullivan's critique would suggest that readers need critical awareness of what is unsaid to understand what is said, but it is not in the nature of pastiche to explore these hidden aspects. Pastiche "elides the distinction between understanding and agreement" (O'Sullivan, 2005, 321), which he suggests is ultimately an impediment to a more thorough conceptualisation of the issues involved in educational disadvantage while an enabler of further interventions to address those issues.

The Act legislated for the establishment of the Educational Disadvantage Committee to research and advise the government on policies and strategies of identifying and correcting educational disadvantage as defined in the act. The committee which convened in 2002 was based on a diverse expert model that included expertise in research, education and social policy rather than a representational one made up of stakeholders such as of parents, DES personnel and teachers. Its final report in 2005, at the end of its term of office, incorporated a reflection on past interventions, analysis of the current situation and a future vision for an inclusive education system. Critically it proposed a re-examination of the fundamental assumptions underpinning educational disadvantage and the approach in Ireland of addressing it. It drew attention to the correspondence of levels of social and economic equality in society with levels of inequality of educational achievement and proposed that no meaningful equality of opportunity was possible without equality of condition (Educational Disadvantage Committee, 2005, 26). It acknowledged that the education system in itself can reinforce inequality and widen the gap between those who benefit and those who are excluded. It recommended continuing professional

development (CPD) for teachers at multiple stages in their career to enhance awareness of diversity issues and additionally that schools in future forge closer links with families and communities. The report acknowledged the inherent difficulties of such a reappraisal, but layered its recommendations in local, regional and national proposals over varying timeframes. While it addressed the technical issues of the required re-evaluation, it was based on phronesis suggesting that education contributes to personal growth and the good of society.

The degree of governmental appreciation for this report may be inferred from the decision by the Minister for Education not to sanction another term of office for the Educational Disadvantage Committee. The legislative provision for its establishment was repealed in 2012 (Government of Ireland, 2012). Its recommendations informed but were not fully reflected in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), an initiative launched by the DES in 2005 to cater for educational disadvantage.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)

DEIS is the current policy initiative designed to address educational disadvantage in Ireland. Before its implementation a survey of pupils' learning attainment in disadvantaged schools had indicated they were three times more likely to be described as having serious literacy difficulties compared with pupils in other schools (Weir and Archer, 2004). Literacy and numeracy standards became the measure with which to gauge evidence of improvements in disadvantaged schools. DEIS based its terms of reference on the definition of educational disadvantage in the Education Act (DES, 2005,7). Its core elements comprised of:

> ...establishing a standardised system for identifying, and regularly reviewing, levels of disadvantage along with a new integrated School Support Programme (SSP) to bring together, and build upon, existing interventions for schools and school clusters/communities with a concentrated level of educational disadvantage
>
> (DES, 2005, 9)

Schools that were identified would receive extra resources from the DES and were required to engage in target setting, monitoring progress and measuring outcomes, in the priority areas of literacy, numeracy, attendance, parental involvement and links with the wider community. Results of standardised tests in literacy and numeracy were used to monitor children's attainment for comparison with the national norm

(Weir et al., 2011), facilitated by advances in data gathering technology. Regular evaluations of such scores would demonstrate the school's effective use of the enhanced resources. The analysis of the data would inform the allocation of supports to schools for the next three-year planning cycle (DES, 2005, 28). It has been suggested that the philosophy of DEIS is stronger on the production of new knowledge of who the excluded are through tighter technologies of surveillance, than it is on addressing socio-political aspects of inequality (Kitching, 2010, 222), contrary to the research recommendations of the Educational Disadvantage Committee (2005). It appears as if it deployed the technical recommendations of the Educational Disadvantage Committee's report without addressing the needs of the specific context of each school situation. For instance, DEIS had indicated that sabbaticals would be offered to teachers to enhance their own learning for the subsequent benefit of their students and colleagues (DES, 2005, 12). This aspect was not implemented and the opportunity for teachers to increase their understanding of their own subjective perspectives in relation to their judgements in education was either lost or denied.

DEIS: Reflecting Global Trends in Education Policy

Whilst the pattern of intervention in the absence of the development of understanding surrounding the construction of "the disadvantaged" established in the 1980's appeared to have continued with the introduction of DEIS twenty years later, three distinct aspects can be detected in DEIS which Sahlberg (2007) identified as features of the global education reform movement (GERM). First, there has been a growing "belief among policy-makers and education reformers that setting clear and sufficiently high performance standards for schools, teachers and students" (Sahlberg, 2007, 150) would result in improved educational outcomes. External testing and evaluation systems emerged to assess the standards set. Second, was an increased focus on literacy and numeracy skills as indicators of educational success, with potential subsequent narrowing of the educational experience available to students in schools. The third feature was the introduction of consequential accountability systems for schools and teachers. All three features were evident in the DEIS initiative when the DES introduced the publication of Whole School Evaluation (WSE) reports in 2006 (Conway and Murphy, 2013). WSEs are evaluations of schools conducted by inspectors, which had previously been used to

inform the school of its progress. GERM is synonymous with neoliberal influences on education systems, as institutional arrangements are installed, step by step to embed comparable evaluative mechanisms of accountability throughout (Connell, 2013,100). There have been serious concerns raised nationally (O'Sullivan, 2005; Drudy, 2009; Lynch et al, 2012; Coolahan et al, 2017) and internationally (Giroux, 2008; Sachs, 2016; Ball, 2015b) about the effects of these neoliberal policies which Apple (2004) argues support the reproduction of advantages for those already privileged in society and further disadvantage those who are not.

In recent years it could be argued that DEIS has been somewhat overshadowed by the publication of *The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020* (DES, 2011) by the government in response to Ireland's disappointing performance in PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) in 2009. The fall from 'above average' to 'average' was interpreted by government and media (Flynn, 2010) as indicating a decline in literacy and numeracy standards in Ireland, though other interpretations were not aired (Kennedy, 2013). While the *National Strategy* recognised that children struggle in education for a variety of reasons and "that children from socially and economically disadvantaged communities are significantly more likely to experience difficulties in literacy and numeracy for reasons associated with poverty, poorer health, and a wide range of other factors" (DES, 2011, 9), it concluded that "such failures are not found in the education system and some are not amenable to school-based solutions"(DES, 2011, 10). It was not suggested that these issues should be addressed, apart from the observation that "effective schools and educational interventions can improve learning outcomes substantially for all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds". Arguably little has changed from a policy perspective over the significant three eras of change in Irish education for those who are disadvantaged, while much has changed for those who work in the system under the neoliberal tendencies of government.

This section dealt specifically with the policies which the literature suggests contributed to the categorisation of 'the disadvantaged' in education since the formation of the state. It highlights an initial absence of critical discourse in policy formation, followed by a silencing of such discourse in favour of maintenance of the status quo. When considered in conjunction with the previous four sections it

demonstrates what Ball (2003) describes as the messy, incoherent nature of policy as the state responds to different sorts of problems, interests and contradictions embedded in a history of previous policies which may be superseded but not expunged.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to contextualise the construction of the concept of educational disadvantage in the Irish education system. To do so it was necessary to situate the role of education within the political, cultural, social and economic milieu operating in Ireland. The establishment of Ireland as an independent state in 1922 was taken as the starting point as it suggested that from that date, the Irish state would have assumed responsibility for the education of people living in the country.

The literature reviewed suggests otherwise. Originally the state, working hand in glove with the dominant Church, facilitated a situation which continues to the present that allowed the education system to be used to meet the needs of the more powerful in society, rather than the needs of society. The ecological framework which underpins this chapter demonstrates that policies and practices which came into being with the establishment of the state have enabled or constrained subsequent activities in the "characteristic forms of understanding (sayings), modes of action (doings), and ways in which people relate to one another and the world (relatings), that 'hang together' in a distinctive project" (Kemmis *et al.*, 2014; Edwards-Groves and Kemmis, 2015, 10) that is the Irish education system.

The chapter considered the three key eras post-independence in which particular policy change occurred, namely; 1922 to 1950s, the 1960s and the 1990s (Coolahan et al., 2017, vii). The first era prioritised cultural nationalism in which primary education was expected to revitalise the Irish language and increase awareness of Irish history with a view to developing a national sense of pride (Walsh et al., 2011). Cultural nationalism became synonymous with paternalistic Catholicism in the denominational school system. The second era in the 1960s marked a change in how the state understood provision and subsequently education policy was firmly linked to the economic needs of the state (Walsh et al., 2011; Loxley et al., 2014). Underpinned by the theory of human capital, its influences are evident in educational thinking to the present (Loxley, 2014, 174). The third era's significance is in the

state's effort to reclaim control of the education system through legislation from 1998 onwards. This era aligns Irish policy aspirations with international neoliberal trends in which governments around the world are engaging in educational reform as a means to address social and mainly economic issues. The literature suggests the emphases of the first two eras had established conditions which facilitated the smooth transition to neoliberal inspired NPM system of control. This review also suggests elements of this new managerialism were first introduced in disadvantaged schools under the guise of DEIS.

The interwoven historical policies and practices explored in this literature review underpinned my own formation in the emergent Irish cultural milieu. Their significance was not apparent as I began to explore my understanding of practice in a disadvantaged primary school. Personal reflexive engagement with Bourdieu's theoretical framework enabled insight of the advantages my individual habitus and cultural capital had provided in my ease of adjustment to the expectations of the education system. The concepts of habitus and cultural capital enabled me to identify the disadvantages those without similar support encounter in the field of Irish primary schooling. The cultural backdrop to that education system did not appear significant at that stage as I explored my individual understanding of practice. I was practice oriented and designed the second-person action research which is reported on in chapter three from that practice orientation. Later as I analysed the findings of that second-person inquiry deeper engagement with the collective features of habitus pointed to the necessity of further literature reviews from a historical perspective. Iterative reviews of literature are a feature of action research as the process raises awareness of gaps in knowledge and understanding as it proceeds (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014,170). For the benefit of readers and to align with a more conventional thesis format that historical background is presented here in chapter two.

Chapters three and four return to the aforementioned practice orientation. As reports they point to the value of action research as an approach which enables reflection on current taken-for-granted assumptions which inform the improvement of that practice. More importantly they outline the process which has haltingly led to the awareness of gaps in my knowledge and understanding of Irish education culture which have been explored in this chapter. As McNiff suggests the kind of theory

which helps improve social situations arises from learning about practice from within the practice itself (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002, 4).

Chapter 3: Research Design

Introduction

Action Research (AR) was used with teachers in Oakwood PS to carry out a qualitative research project. This AR endeavoured to:

- Gain an understanding of current perceptions about teaching and learning in this school using interviews
- Plan interventions which would facilitate the use of the children's local cultural influences and experiences to form the stimulus for learning activities in school
- Evaluate if such interventions further teachers' knowledge and understanding of the children's context and facilitate improved teaching and learning in this school
- Analyse if AR can support teachers' ability to recognise the epistemological resources which children acquire from their home environments.

This chapter focuses on the philosophical assumptions and methodological rationale that informed the design and initial two cycles of AR with teachers in which they engaged in an action research project with their pupils. Its construction was facilitated through reflexive engagement with Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, cultural capital and field at a stage in the research process when these concepts were understood at an individual personal level. It was designed as a methodology to answer the research questions which had emerged through self-study:

1. In what ways do teachers' habitus and cultural capital influence their teaching practice in this school?
2. To what extent do teachers' habitus influence their perceptions of indigenous cultural capitals and related habitus of the children they teach?
3. How do teachers interpret the curriculum to meet the learning needs of children with diverse habitus and cultural capitals?
4. How does engaging in action research contribute to teachers' acknowledgement of indigenous cultural diversity in this school?

The purpose of the design was to allow teachers the opportunity to develop a more nuanced understanding of children's lives, knowledge and interests outside of school

with a view to include those aspects in school activities as envisaged in the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999).

This chapter comprises of two main sections. The first describes action research as an approach for inclusive inquiry and discusses common characteristics found in the varied forms of this broad ranging approach. It outlines the evolution of a research design which incorporates those characteristics and is situated in Oakwood PS. The second section details the research design in which the continuation of self-study is set alongside research with other participants. The various methods of data gathering are outlined as action research allows for flexibility of approach to meet the needs of the inquiry.

What is action research?

"Action research is a broad landscape of distinctive, and primarily qualitative research strategies for bringing about social change through action, developing and improving practice and, at the same time, generating and testing theory" (Titchen, 2015, 2). It aims at both taking action and creating knowledge so that it differs from traditional research approaches which aim at creating knowledge only (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, xiii).

McNiff suggests that action research is not a rigidly definable form of practice (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002, 140). Definition can appear problematic as "the plethora of terms coined to describe this research reflects wide disagreement on many key issues"(Herr and Anderson, 2005, 3). They list seventeen of the more common terms in use for this approach to research, suggesting that the type of action research undertaken depends on the different purposes, positions, ideological and philosophical assumptions of the researcher. While the literature emphasises the eclectic nature of action research, it also accentuates that a common denominator of action research is concerned with bringing about change aimed at improvement to some aspect of practice and simultaneously generating theory through research activity (Dohn, 2014, 75; Cohen et al., 2011,344; Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, 43).

Characteristics Common to Diverse Action Research Approaches

Titchen (2015) acknowledges that while there is a variety of ways to engage in the process, there are nine similar characteristics shared by the different action research

approaches. She suggests action research is **collaborative** while also **systematic** and **rigorous**. It is **future** oriented though dependent on **reflective** and **reflexive** practices. It is continuously **evaluative** and **participative**, cognisant of the **situational** context in which it takes place and based on **values**. While the characteristics overlap to some extent, taking each in isolation aids differentiation of this approach from other qualitative approaches and maps out in advance my interpretation of these characteristics as they applied to the various aspects of the research project on which this thesis reports.

Action research is a **collaborative**, democratic partnership, where members of the system being studied participate actively in the process (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, 6), which shifts the locus of control from professional researchers to those who have been traditionally called the subjects of research (Herr and Anderson, 2005, 2). Self-study, a branch of action research, is not on self per se but on the space between self and the practice engaged in (Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001). It is undertaken through collaboration and dialogue with others who can offer constructive challenge and critique (Sullivan et al. 2016, 28) to enrich and broaden one's perspectives.

Systematic is defined as proceeding to an agreed set of methods or organised plan (Cambridge Online dictionary) which appears to contradict the notion that a strength of action research is its adaptability as a research methodology with an evolving, emergent design (Anderson et al., 2007, 163). This tension is reconciled through systematic reflection and rigorous documentation of the process and outcomes of each cycle to inform the design of subsequent cycles (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, 16). Demonstrating the systematic development of the action research process both to participants or people external to the project, engenders their confidence in its authenticity and rigour.

Ensuring **rigour** is a common element of all types of qualitative research, including action research (Titchen, 2015, 8). Dick suggests that ensuring rigour is more challenging due to the responsive nature of action research to specific situations and contexts and deepening/ evolving understandings of those involved in the process. Therefore it is necessary for action researchers to collect and interpret data in defensible ways so that even as the research evolves, researcher choices and decisions can be defended by evidence (Dick, 1993, 10). Sullivan et al. (2016)

identify specific dilemmas in the conduct of rigorous and valid research to ensure accuracy in reporting all facts given the nature of the various participant perspectives. They emphasise ethical conduct, as outlined in Chapter 1, and how care is shown to all participants along with identifying the relevant data-collection tools to generate evidence of new learning.

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) further differentiate between qualitative and action research by suggesting that qualitative research is focussed on the past whereas "action research builds on the past, and takes place in the present, with a view to shaping the **future**" (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, 9). Action research operates in a zone of possibility where possible futures exist in the real present. It is what we do now that influences the future (McNiff and Whitehead 2002,11). They emphasise that action research is more than just doing activities; it is related to researcher's values, intentions and purposes for doing the research. Whilst the "intention is of acting in ways to make things better than before" (Kemmis, 2013, 132), one needs to engage in careful deliberation as the consequences of good intentions cannot be predicted or guaranteed (Brookfield,1995; Arendt, 1998). "Action research may be a way of coming to understand the world and becoming experienced in order to act more wisely in the future" (Kemmis, 2010, 423), which necessitates serious reflection.

Action research is a **reflective** process, "but is different from isolated spontaneous reflection in that it is deliberately undertaken and generally requires some form of evidence be presented to support assertions" (Herr and Anderson, 2005, 3). Brookfield (1995) guides teachers in examining their practice in a critically reflective way through using four different lenses or perspectives; (1) the lens of our own autobiographies as learners, (2) the lens of student eyes, (3) the lens of colleagues' perceptions and (4) the lens of educational literature, to examine judgements and evaluate practice. Brookfield's approach reflects philosophical assumptions which acknowledge the different perspectives of participants' epistemological and ontological views and the co-construction of knowledge.

In relation to action research, Coghlan and Brannick (2014) state that the three forms of reflection identified by Mezirow (1991) of content reflection, process reflection and premise reflection are critical to the process. Content refers to what is framed,

planned, acted on and evaluated. Process reflection refers to how the actions were constructed, conducted and their potential influence on future practice. Premise reflection is inquiry into the unstated and underlying assumptions which influence attitudes and behaviour, what Bourdieu described as 'habitus' and what Kemmis captures in practice architectures. Such reflection leads to the development of interiority, a process of intellectual self awareness in which we acknowledge what we know and also how we know it. Reflection is a process of interiority and is explained as a process of stepping back from experience to question it. It is the critical link between the concrete experience, the judgement and taking new action (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, 52), equally supported and dependent on reflexivity.

Morrison (2007) proposes two meanings for **reflexivity**, first that all research orientations are shaped by and reflected in the social, political and educational worlds in which individual researchers operate and second, that researchers need to be aware of the way such orientations affect all research aspects, including decisions about selection of research topics. On the other hand this thesis shows that the process of researching enables reflexive capacity that is fractured. It concurs with Morrison who acknowledges that while reflexivity is challenging in that it brings to the fore features of research that may otherwise have remained hidden, assumed or denied it potentially serves as a counterpoint to naivety. As the researcher is a research instrument, one needs to monitor closely and continually one's own interactions with other participants, one's own reactions, roles, biases and any other matters that might affect the research (Cohen et al., 2011, 225) as "reflexivity as a concept suggests that the position or perspective of the researcher shapes everything" (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, 474). Pierre Bourdieu encouraged researchers to use his theoretical framework reflexively on their own position vis-à-vis their research interest (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) which underpins this research process. Reflexivity has the potential to become "a tool for connecting self with others, enabling critical discourse among members of a community of practice"(Wilcox, 2009, 125).

Evaluation is integral to the action research cycle (Titchen, 2015,8); as it informs subsequent decisions in the process, based on the reflective level. On another level reflexivity takes it into the realm of critical educational research (Kemmis, 2006) as participants become aware of the political, social and cultural forces that affect

practice and subsequent research foci. Action research has the capacity to open communicative spaces in which ‘the way things are’ is open to question and exploration (Kemmis, 2006, 474), by those engaged in the practice. It does not start from a desire of changing others 'out there', rather it starts from an orientation of change with others (Reason and Bradbury, 2013); the participants in the research.

Action research is **participative** to varying degrees according to the research worldview adopted (Titchen, 2015, 8). If it is to be genuinely participative then all involved should be conscious of the diverse and sometimes conflicting views and subjectivities of their co-participants so that their work together can be a model of democratic dialogue - for which Kemmis proposes Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action (1984, cited in Kemmis, 2006) to support the movement from individual subjective understanding to the development of communicative spaces that allow different voices to be heard, to take different perspectives into account, to reach agreements with one another without coercion, and to agree on what should be done in the light of collectively reached understandings (Kemmis, 2006, 471-472). Habermas's ideal speech situation is governed by several principles, including: mutual understanding between participants, freedom to participate in the conversation, equal opportunity to participate, discussion to be free from domination and movement towards consensus on the basis of the discussion alone rather than the position of the speakers (Cohen et al., 2011, 450). Cohen et al. suggest that such dialogic processes uncover the repressive forces which distort communication. Action research has been described as an orientation that seeks to create participative communities of inquiry in which qualities of engagement, curiosity and question posing are brought to bear on significant practical issues (Reason and Bradbury, 2013, 1)

Action research is **situational** in that the practical issues in question concern participants' perspectives, relationships and practices in their own context. Kemmis et al. (2014) claim that participants in any situation encounter one another in *intersubjective spaces*, first in the *language*; second, in *space-time in the material world*; and third, in *social relationships*. It is their view that individual and collective practices shape and are shaped by what they describe as practice architectures so that the *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings* characteristic of the practice in a situation hang together in projects that in turn shape and are shaped by practice traditions that

represent the history of the happenings of the practice, enabling its reproduction and act as a collective memory of the practice (Kemmis et al., 2014, 31). Rather than seeing individuals as entering a situation and learning the practices already embedded there, they see individuals entering an organisation with interpretations of practice and relationships acquired over a lifetime in social situations. To understand others, people engage in sophisticated processes of interpretation also acquired over a lifetime. Therefore a situation can be viewed and interpreted differently by various participants depending on their worldview and indeed position within the situation. So while action research is considered relevant to the situation in which research is carried out (Titchen, 2015), it takes place in situations that reflect a society characterised by conflicting values, unequal distribution of resources and power (Herr and Anderson, 2005, 4), and subject to the prevailing social, political and cultural influences.

The final common characteristic of AR is that of values. How one appreciates or evaluates meaning depends on one's **values**, as "values permeate our description of reality" (Pring, 2004, 77) and play a pivotal role in action research (Herr and Anderson, 2005; McNiff and Whitehead, 2002; Titchen, 2015) as they underpin the framing of one's research interest and questions (Sullivan et al., 2016, 3). There is often a distinction between what one professes to value and one's values in action (Larrivee, 2000), what Whitehead names as 'living contradictions' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002, 8).Values are our ideals; hence, they are subjective and arouse an emotional response and often sets of values are in conflict (Larrivee, 2000, 295). While the importance of values is frequently discussed, articulating these values explicitly is less commonplace as they are part of one's taken-for-granted reality, influenced by one's background and cultural context. Identifying values is dependent on reflective and reflexive dispositions. When people are invested in dominant cultural values, it defines their sense of identity and to question these values "can involve a kind of 'shattering' emotional experience" (Boler, 2004, 120,) which underlines the potential difficulties associated with this process.

As an action researcher one must clarify and articulate one's own values before seeking to understand those of other participants (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002). Typically self study or *first-person* research is characterised as a form of inquiry to purposefully examine one's basic assumptions, values, desires, intentions and

philosophy of life (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014). It brings inquiry into our moments of action, not as outside researchers, but in the whole range of everyday activities (Reason and Bradbury, 2013). "It takes us 'upstream' toward the source of our attention which helps us to clarify where 'we are coming from' and the purposes of our inquiry for ourselves and others" (Reason and Torbert, 2001, 17), and 'downstream' to inquire into our ways of behaving, relating and action in the world (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, 7). It precedes and accompanies one's efforts to engage in *second-person* inquiry with others on issues of mutual concern through dialogue, conversation and joint action. *First-person* inquiry helps researchers discern their own values about whom and how others are involved in the research process to what is the focus of the research.

These nine characteristics acted as principles around which the second-person research was designed and conducted. They underpin the design of the research outlined in section two of this chapter. Carr and Kemmis captured the essence of the action research approach I envisioned for engaging colleagues in the inquiry with:

> Action research is simply a form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out.
>
> (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, 162)

This definition suggests that action research is both an individual and co-operative process, in which participants get the opportunity to think about practice, the purpose of practice and their understanding of that purpose and practice itself, in the specific context in which the practice takes place. It expressed what I hoped the research would enable: teachers in the school would engage with me in exploring what, how and why we practiced in the way that had become established, and in doing so imagine how the practice could be better understood and improved for both teachers and children.

The Research Design

The previous section thoroughly explored action research and justified the rationale for adopting it as the research approach in this study. This next section of the chapter details the design of the research undertaken in this school. It starts with the general features of the design, introduces the participants and then describes the classroom

intervention project and interview methods used. The implementation of the design, including the changes made as it evolved, which is an evaluative feature of action research, are then outlined and the section concludes with a synopsis of data generated.

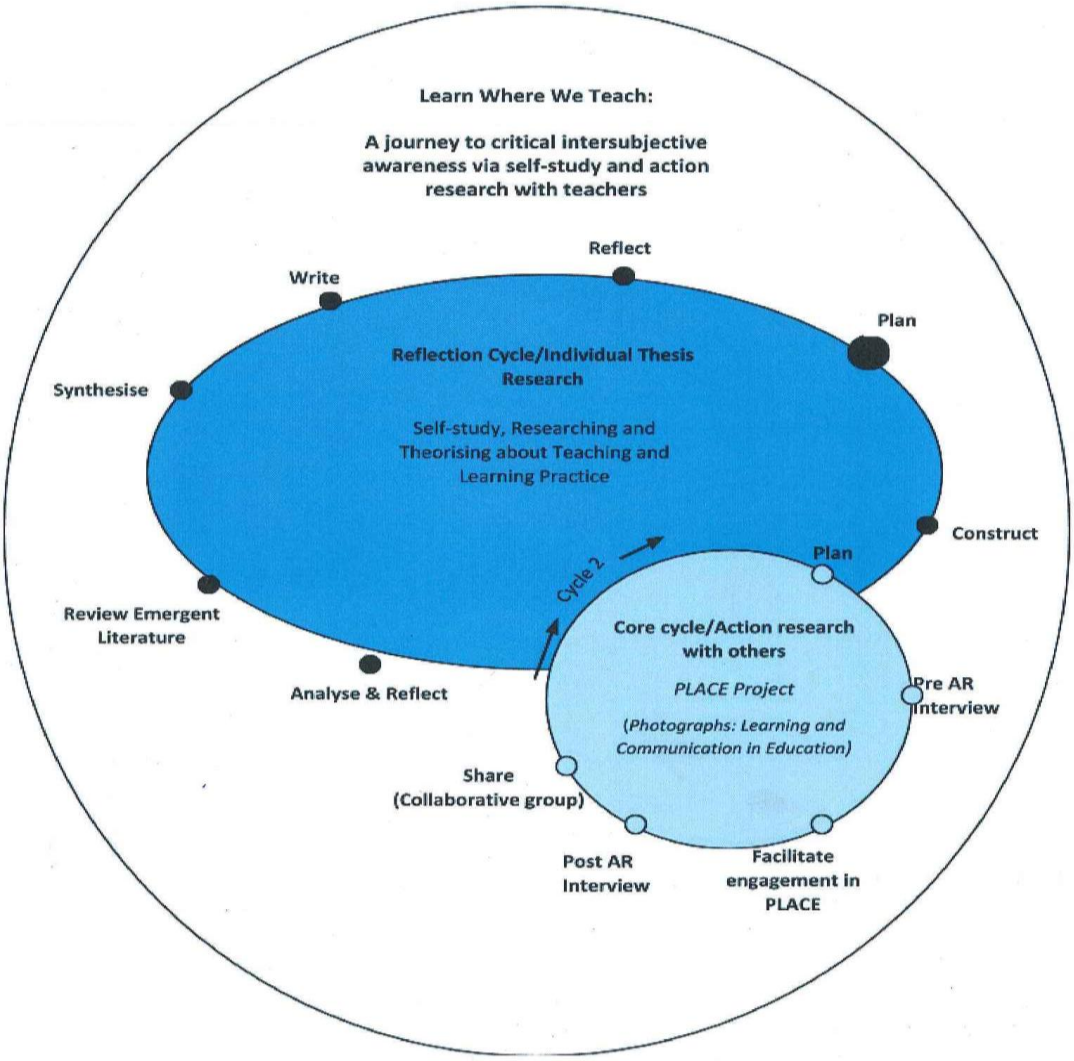
Rationale and Outline of Research Design

The design centred on engaging other teachers in this research, through a "research process that was itself a form of practice" (Wilcox et al., 2004, 274). It built on the principles underpinning the Primary School Curriculum and aligned with the ethical values underpinning the Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers (Teaching Council, 2012). While it was designed to equally respect the voices of pupils and teachers, only teachers' perspectives are relevant to the aims of this thesis. Ethical approval from the University of Lincoln was sought and approved before the research commenced (Appendix 1).

The core of the design had three distinct but interrelated spaces. The central space comprised of a classroom intervention/action in which teachers engaged in a project named PLACE with the specific purpose of learning more about the children's interests. Before this central activity commenced, teachers' perspectives were captured through interview. The final space comprised of follow up interviews designed to ascertain if the project had facilitated teacher reflection or questioning of their practice. This three-spaced design represents a single cycle, which was iterated twice over the course of this research.

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) differentiate between the core cycle and the reflection cycle, but emphasise that both cycles operate in parallel. The reflection cycle, encapsulates all stages of the personal learning process namely, constructing, planning, taking action, evaluating and finally writing about it in this thesis. It is essential for the development of meta-learning, that is learning about learning (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, 13). The remainder of this section of the chapter refers to the core cycle in which insights garnered through self study surfaced in second person research which involved engaging with others in the inquiry process. Diagram 3.1 shows the relationship of both cycles to each other.

Diagram 3.1: Second-person inquiry design fits within and alongside evolving self-study. After: J. Davis, 2004



The Participants

All 12 teachers working at the school were invited to participate in the research in September 2014 (Appendix 2), by a personal letter to them which explicitly stated the purpose of the research and what their involvement would entail. The voluntary nature of participation was stressed. Ten teachers accepted the invitation while two declined for various reasons. It is advised to start with small steps (McNiff, 2002; Cohen et al., 2011), so the first cycle of action research involved two teachers, over a six month period from January to June 2015. They were selected for cycle one as neither had other projects pending at that time. The next cycle involved four more teachers from January to June 2016. Three of the other teachers who had expressed

interest had either recently changed class group or role in the school so deferred engaging in action research until they were familiar with their new role. One teacher was on maternity leave. This thesis reports on these two cycles.

In total six teachers featured in this research. All names have been anonymised. Table 3.1 shows the length of experience each teacher had at the time when they engaged in the first interview. Anna and Hannah participated in the first cycle. They were joined by the others for cycle two.

Table 3.1: Length of Participants' Teaching Experience

Name	Anna	Hannah	Denise	Eimear	Laura	Gillian
Years of experience	6 years	8 years	12 years	16 years	17 years	23 years

The Central Space of the Design: PLACE Classroom Project

The central classroom-based project focused on practice and provided a concrete context through which to explore our assumptions through action aligned with the principles of the Primary curriculum. It was designed to facilitate dialogue between teachers and pupils on topics of conversation suggested by pupils from their own lives outside school, mediated through photographs taken by the pupils. PLACE is an imperfectly formed acronym for Photographs to stimulate Language, Learning and Communication in Education. The word 'place' was also important as it captured the notion that the context in which the educational transaction between teacher and pupils occurs is related to experiential learning and prior knowledge of that place. Research on the use of photography in schools had shown it as an appropriate tool to use for this project as it stimulates conversation (Harper, 2002); visual stimuli support children's use of broader and deeper language (Card, 2012) and photographs support the generation of themes based on children's interests which stimulates knowledge production (Ali-Khan and Siry, 2014). Moreover research has shown that the use of photographs supported teachers' more nuanced understanding of children's lifeworlds (Allen, 2002).

PLACE built on these studies in the hope that learning in Oakwood PS would be enhanced by improved relationships and shared understandings, as had happened elsewhere (Allen, 2002). Moreover it facilitated the acknowledgement of pupil

habitus and the knowledge they had acquired from the cultural capital of their families and communities. It aligned with the concept of pedagogical reciprocity, that is when teachers and students learn together and from each other (Zyngier, 2011). This approach has been described as transformative for both parties. It also accords with the notion that students need to see their lives reflected in the curriculum (Lopez, 2014). It appeared that photographs could facilitate the sharing of interpretations of the cultural aspects of social life (Rose, 2012). The influence of Freirean pedagogy, which values the knowledge of living experience as a site for reflection and connection with others in the struggle to understand is evident in PLACE (Freire, 1992).

PLACE is not typical of action research as the researcher designed the project rather than it emerging from the problem-posing of the participants. In justification, as an insider I was aware that a previous project using photographs, inspired by PWIM[8] had been well received by teachers and pupils. In that project photographs taken of the locality by a photographer had been used as stimuli for the local studies strand in SESE (social environmental scientific education). Those photographs were provided to the teachers and pupils. The key difference in the PLACE project was that the photographs were taken by the children to initiate the topic of conversation. PLACE was designed to complement and build on previous practice, while providing a space for teachers and children to engage in authentic conversation.

Authentic conversation appears as a benign intention, while engaging in PLACE presented participants with a request to engage in practice that differed from the more prescriptive training to which teachers in disadvantaged schools had become accustomed since the implementation of DEIS in 2005 and the literacy and numeracy strategy in 2011. In contrast, PLACE was situated in the context of the school, valued the prior experience and knowledge of children and trusted teachers' commitment to support children's learning. Teachers were asked to learn what the children were interested in from the photographs and conversations they initiated. They were asked to consider how these interests could inform their planning of classroom activities. PLACE did not propose specific learning outcomes for children,

[8] Picture word induction model (PWIM) is a strategy recommended for use in language lessons. It had been adapted prior to this research to include photographs of the local environment. See page 36 of Five Components of Effective Oral Language Instruction. Available at: www.pdst.ie/sites/default/files/14.%20Five%20Components%20of%20Oral%20Language_0.pdf.

other than those contained in the principles of the Primary School Curriculum (1999). Rather it focused on creating a space for teachers and children to learn from each other, acknowledge individual subjectivities and facilitate teacher praxis in the multiplicity of the classroom (Aoki, 1993). Its aim was to empower teachers to reflect on and question current practice informed by their experience of PLACE. It aspired to be within a transformative category of CPD (Kennedy, 2005).

Details of the PLACE project were explained to teachers in the letter of invitation to participate in research in September 2014 (Appendix 2). As teachers accepted the invitation they showed interest in the photographic element, possibly because it built on prior positive practice. None of the teachers decided on a different approach other than using photographs, though they had been informed they were not obliged to engage with photographs to be involved in the research. (Appendix 2) Teachers were asked to keep a reflective diary of their experience throughout the project. This diary would contribute to their learning and also be used to support the conversation in the follow up interview.

Before the action research commenced in each classroom, teachers explained the project to parents by letter. Parental support and consent for their children's involvement was sought (Appendix 4). It was not obligatory for children to take part, only if they wished to share a photograph. It was important that parents viewed and approved the photographs their children wished to share in school and that they were aware of these photographs would be shared with others in school.

Interviews

Interviews in qualitative research are conversations which facilitate "an exchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest", emphasising "the social situatedness of the research data" (Cohen et al, 2011, 409). They are appropriate when a researcher wants a form of one to one communication in order to probe deeply into the participant’s experiences, understandings, attitudes and perspectives. Before the PLACE project commenced in a classroom, each teacher engaged in an interview which was designed to hear their perspectives on their role in the school and the various factors which had influenced those perspectives. After PLACE they were interviewed again to ascertain whether their perspectives on practice had changed.

Kvale (2006) is critical of the notion that interviews are warm and caring dialogical encounters and posits that such a conception is misleading. Rather it is a meeting designed by the interviewer with the specific goal of obtaining information from another person or persons, to meet the purposes of the interviewer. In part, that interpretation sounds ominous, but if the purpose of the interviewer is to support the overall professional well-being of the interviewees to reflect on their understanding of their own practices in the specific context of their work, then interview as a social research method is considered compatible with the overall action research design.

The vast literature on interview types (Cohen et al., 2011,412) is more easily conceptualised in a typology that distinguishes between structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Robson, 2011, 469). Cohen et al. (2011) suggest that the more one wishes to acquire unique, non-standardised, personalised information about how people view the world, the more one veers towards qualitative, open-ended, unstructured interviewing. Although such personalised perspectives were desired, for a novice researcher semi-structured interviews offered more scaffolding, in that the interview questions were pre-planned to ensure the information required to answer the research questions was sought (Bryman, 2012; Rowley, 2012).

As I wanted to hear teachers' unique, non-standard and personalised information about their view of practice, "responsive interviewing" (Rubin and Rubin, 2005) appeared specifically appropriate. Responsive interviewing involves choosing interviewees who are knowledgeable about the research topic (in this case their own practice), listening carefully to what they tell and asking further questions about their contributions until one really understands their perspective. Rubin and Rubin group interviews into two broad but not completely distinct categories of topical or cultural interviews. Topical interviews "explore what, when, how, why and with what consequence something happened, getting at the facts of the matter" (Rubin and Rubin, 2005, 11). As this research initially explored the ordinary, routine, taken-for-granted norms, values and practices of a group of teachers in one school, before they engaged in the action cycle, the first interview (hereafter referred to as Pre-AR interview) belonged to the cultural category. Cultural interviews involve more active listening than aggressive questioning to elicit examples that illustrate widespread assumptions, norms or common behaviours (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). The second interview (Post-AR) which followed the action research intervention veered more to

the topical category, interpreted through the teachers' perspectives on their action research reflections. These reflections were used to "open up spaces for new ways of thinking, being and doing" (Roulston, 2010, 220), commensurate with an action research approach. The Pre-AR interview built on teacher's past experiences and the Post-AR interview explored possibilities for future practice.

Interview was selected as an appropriate tool that aligned with the nine characteristics framing this action research. At the design stage of this research it was hoped that interview would contribute to the empowerment of teachers to question and reflect on our practice in this school and on the various factors perceived as enabling or constraining practice. While interviews are considered a sensitive and powerful method; they are, in themselves, neither ethical nor unethical, neither emancipating nor oppressing (Kvale, 2006, 497). The conduct and intentions of the interviewer mainly determine the ethical qualities of any particular interview.

Administering the Interviews

At the design stage I had envisioned the interviews as conversations between colleagues on a topic of mutual interest, and preferred the term 'conversational partner' (Rubin and Rubin, 2005) rather than interviewee. I was aware that both partners, interviewer and interviewee, experience the conversation differently depending on their background, experience and purpose for participating in it (Rowley, 2012, 266). However my deeper engagement in the literature revealed that the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is increasingly conceptualised as a power relation, where power is understood to refer to the activities of interview participants which are directed towards reciprocally controlling the situation, and influencing the other person’s actions and conversation (Vähäsantanen and Saarinen, 2012, 494). Kvale argues that the qualitative research interview could entail a hierarchical relationship with an asymmetrical power distribution in favour of the interviewer who "rules the interview" by setting the agenda according to their research interest and have been known to manipulate interviewees into revealing unintended information (Kvale, 2006, 484). Cognisant of general ethical behaviour in research and practice, and personal values of justice and care to others I set out to treat the conversational partners with respect, care and courtesy throughout the research process. However in conducting the research my view of my own positionality within the school and the research process was challenged.

Practice and Researcher Positionality

Initially I thought of myself as an insider researcher, researching practice in our own school, with my colleagues. I had a level of understanding of what were considered positives and challenges in school practice. As head teacher I felt a responsibility to teachers and pupils to use the research opportunity to seek understanding and improvements in our practice. I felt I was a researcher and a practitioner at the same time. That initial view was challenged with the suggestion that a head teacher interviewing teachers was problematic from a trustworthiness and ethical standpoint (Anderson et al., 2007, 9). In terms of trustworthiness they posit that it is unlikely teachers will be frank and honest when being interviewed by the head teacher, thus the quality of the data will be questionable. Secondly it was suggested that from an ethical standpoint teachers may feel coerced into participating, even if they were invited to volunteer. My experience would have indicated that teachers in Oakwood regularly conveyed their opinions but as already clarified I had realised that experience is sometimes an insufficient basis on which to make informed decisions. In parallel to the research with teachers, through self-study I was questioning my accepted view of my position in the education system. My certainty about my insider status had diminished. I was physically an insider but seemed to be hovering over myself, observing my actions, thoughts and interactions with others while questioning the routine practices and assumptions I had previously taken for granted. Retrospectively I realise this was a period of emerging interiority. The time that had elapsed between designing the research, getting ethical approval and engaging with research literature and the taught doctoral modules had affected changes in my thinking. While I desired the security of insider positionality, the research process had shifted how I viewed reality and therefore I acknowledged I was an insider who also identified as an outsider (Herr and Anderson, 2005, 44). Making this duality of position explicit enabled me to proceed with the research with awareness of respect and understanding of others' world views. It had also demonstrated how one's position can inhibit perceptions of the power related to that position.

This embodied awareness of power perceptions raised awareness that my intentions could be misinterpreted by potential participants or future readers of this thesis. I therefore planned for other aspects of potential power asymmetry in the research. It has been suggested that the manifestations of power are only partly related to

interview settings or to formal power relations; that power is mainly intertwined with the subject's gender, age, and professional background (Vähäsantanen and Saarinen, 2012, 494). As all participants were female, gender did not appear to be an issue, but as I was older than all of them, had more professional experience and was engaging in a doctoral research programme, I presented my genuine position at each interview. I stated I was a research student who was learning about research to enhance my role as head teacher in the school with a view to supporting teachers, pupils and myself. I emphasised that I appreciated their participation and time and offered all of them a transcript of the interview, which they could read to ensure I had accurately captured the conversation.

I negotiated a time and place for the interviews that best suited them. At the beginning of each interview I revised the concept of informed consent, and clarified that the participant could decide to withdraw from the research up until the formal thesis was started. All participants agreed to have the conversation recorded. I gave each participant control of the recording device informing them that they could pause or stop it at any stage during the conversation if they so wished. With these actions I intentionally gave power in the process to the participants to emphasise the positional balance I wished to convey in the encounter of establishing meaning and knowledge production (Vähäsantanen and Saarinen, 2012, 496-504).

All that caution to ensure that participants felt empowered was balanced by the notion that interviewees often "welcome the opportunity to reflect on and talk about topics in which they are interested" (Rowley, 2012, 266), therefore despite the risks involved I felt optimistic about the endeavour.

The Pre-AR interviews

The main purpose of the first interview before teachers engaged in action research was to hear their perspectives on their role as teachers and to what extent those perspectives were influenced by factors in their own childhoods, their primary, secondary and tertiary educational experience and early teaching experiences. Influenced by Bourdieu's theoretical framework, the interview questions were mainly deductive, and although the concepts of habitus or cultural capital were not used, the questions were designed to cover these concepts (Rowley, 2012, 265). The first set of questions, while central to the research questions, related to the participants' own

childhood and education, set a relaxed conversational tone. The interview was structured with the support of an interview guide which comprised of main questions, follow up questions and probes (Appendix 3). Main questions provided a structure; follow up questions were specific to the responses made by participants while probes were used to encourage participants to continue, elaborate or to check for clarification which generated rich data. (Rubin and Rubin 2005, 130-150).

While the interviews were mainly concerned with hearing what the participants said, close observation was also important as messages are also communicated with body language (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013, 361). On the whole participants appeared relaxed and forthcoming with their views, with four concluding that it was good to get the opportunity and time to talk. While the same main questions were asked in all six interviews, the duration of the interviews varied from thirty five minutes to one hour.

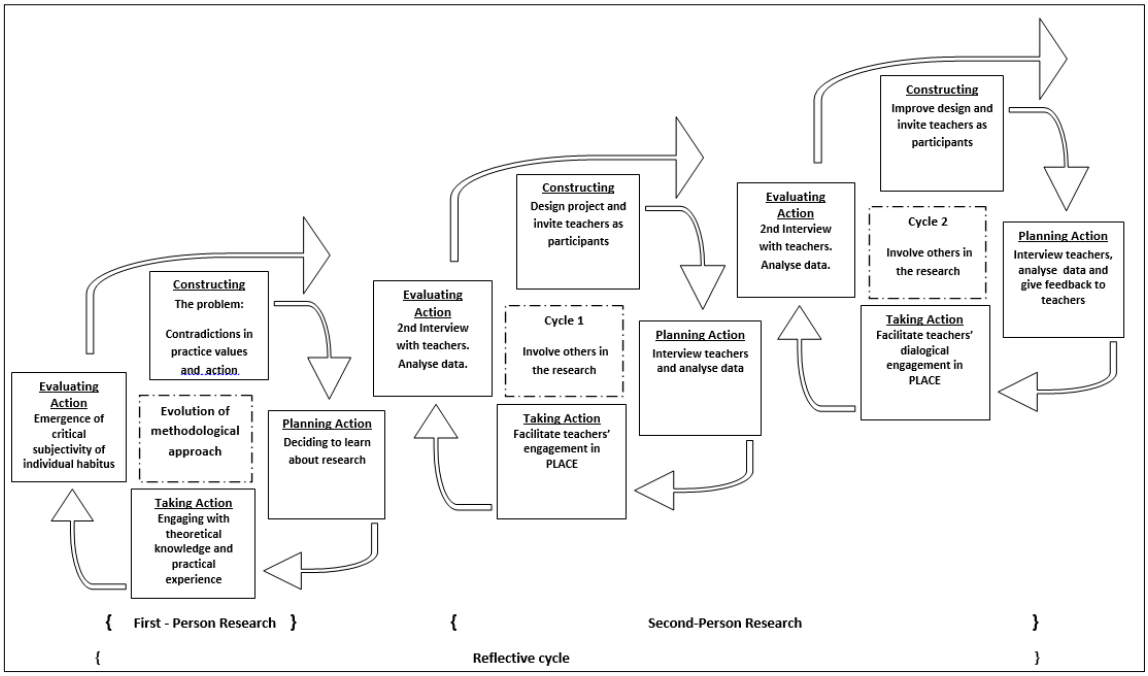
Post-AR Interviews

The interviews scheduled for after PLACE (Post-AR) followed a similar format but were less structured than the Pre-AR ones. They were designed to hear teachers' views on the action research project, what they considered they had learned about the children and about their own teaching practice. It comprised of three main questions. In general there was a contrast with the previous conversations as teachers reported their observations about aspects of the project they found challenging, rewarding and informative rather than responding to questions asked of them. They referred to data they had generated in their diaries/blogs. It naturally opened space for teachers themselves to question their responses to PLACE and aspects of practice in a more general way.

The Two Cycles of Action Research

The chronology of cycle one and two is outlined in this section. The chapter will then focus on the parallel reflective cycle, in which my reflection on the action and reflexive awareness of my involvement informed the changes which were made to the design following cycle one. The section will conclude with an outline of all data generated which was analysed to inform the discussion in chapter six of this thesis.

Diagram 3.2 The Chronology of Second-Person Research that evolved from First-Person or Self-Study Research



Cycle one commenced in January 2015 following receipt of ethical approval for this research. Two participants, Anna and Hannah, participated in their Pre-AR interviews. They proceeded almost immediately to begin their PLACE projects by informing parents of the details of the project and acquiring parental consent for children to take part. They used hard covered notebooks to record their reflections. The PLACE projects lasted until the beginning of June and later that month both teachers participated in the Post-AR interviews.

After cycle one of the PLACE projects commenced the tension between the roles of head teacher and researcher emerged. As head teacher, my usual practice would have involved taking an interest in how the teaching practice was developing through initiating discussion. As researcher I felt this might skew the research if I was too involved. Discussion with critical friends helped me to decide to wait for the teachers to initiate conversations about PLACE, which resolved the tension somewhat. I detected from the informal chats both teachers initiated that the children were responding well to the project and that both teachers were pleased with the conversations the children were initiating. My general observations of the children's enthusiasm corroborated both teachers' evaluation of pupil engagement in PLACE.

It was not until the Post-AR interviews that I garnered a deeper sense of the teachers' response to the children's interest and to the project in general.

Parallel Reflective Cycle: Learning from Cycle One to Inform Cycle Two

Action research is a flexible responsive approach which unfolds in real time. Changes and developments need to be recorded and articulated to show the evidence and rationale for these changes (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014,10). Therefore the initial design of this second-person research assumed that such changes would emerge in response to the process. Given the nature of action research which evolves through cycles of acting and reflecting, it was not feasible to map out a detailed anticipation of issues in advance, but at this juncture two issues surfaced namely participant well-being and secondly the need for more continuous dialogue throughout the cycles.

Firstly, even as the cycles were designed, I was concerned that some issues would be uncovered which possibly could upset participants. This presented an ethical dilemma as participant well-being was central to the design. However I thought this risk was warranted as engagement with Bourdieuian theory had suggested that as professionals we needed to become more critically aware of how habitus can affect thinking and practice. Therefore after much deliberation, I presented the research as an opportunity for teachers to engage in research to learn about children's local knowledge and interests as suggested in the principles of the Primary School Curriculum and as a counterbalance to increased prescription and standardisation in recent DES policy and CPD. I decided to not articulate the transformative effect self-study had on my perspectives and how some of the assumptions I held were challenged. I did not share the notion that as teachers our perspectives may be constrained by our taken-for-granted cultural and social backgrounds (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Mills and Gale, 2007). First of all, others may not have been as influenced by or as unaware of habitus as I had been. Secondly the research could have appeared threatening when that was not intended. It was intended as an opportunity for others to think about practice and there was every possibility that their thinking could differ from mine. However this decision did not align fully with the participative and transparent aspects of the research I had envisioned.

I reviewed this decision during cycle two conducted from December 2015 until June

2016. Following analysis of the Pre-AR interviews of cycle two in December 2015, it became evident that each and every one of the participants practiced with the best intentions for their pupils. While in cycle one I had detected this same commitment, it was confirmed in cycle two. I became more confident that articulation of my interpretation of Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction would not have a maleficent impact on participants due to their commitment to their pupils overall welfare and education. I fed back my initial analysis of the Pre-AR interviews to all six participating teachers in a discussion group, in January 2016 before they embarked on their PLACE project. This collaborative discussion group meeting had not been in the design but emerged in response to the evolving research.

In the collaborative discussion group, I gave each teacher a document which outlined their (anonymised) mainly positive memories of school, substantial support from their parents and families and relative success at every stage of school (Appendix 5). These observations sparked a discussion about their similar autobiographies, which facilitated an opportunity to discuss the advantages we had in education, which had been individually recalled, but not previously shared. During this discussion I articulated my interpretation of Bourdieu's theory that the possession of a certain habitus prepares one for success in certain fields and related it to my own ease in fitting in with school requirements.

The document contained quotes from the participants (again anonymised) about their perceptions of what the children's interests were and the constraints which they felt prevented them from connecting the children's interests with the work in school. The principles of the curriculum were recorded on the document. I hoped the document and discussion provided a clearer rationale as to why I was suggesting they engage in action research to learn about their pupils' interests.

It was also reiterated on that document that there were no specific outcomes required from PLACE apart from learning more about their pupils' interests. Their professional judgement would inform the decisions they made. This aspect of the research raised concerns about an external evaluation or inspection that could potentially occur at any time. Some of the participants had concerns that inspectors would not approve of this practice. As a pre-emptive action, it was stated on the document that engaging in this project was compatible with and even exemplified the

ethical values of professional practice and professional development underpinning the 'Code of Professional Conduct For Teachers' (Teaching Council, 2012, 8). Insider knowledge of some participants' concerns about external evaluation had informed this decision.

The teachers who had just joined for cycle two, then talked with those who had already participated in cycle one about their experience of PLACE. The questions they asked Anna and Hannah mainly concerned technical aspects such as camera sharing, photo storage and creating space in the timetable for the project. These were sensible practical concerns that facilitated their engagement in the project.

Secondly, following cycle one it became apparent that an opportunity for more dialogue during the action research would have supported my engagement in the process. Both teachers had used diaries to record their reflections throughout the action research. While the act of recording observations and thoughts was valuable in itself, the diaries did not facilitate dialogue during the process but were referred to in the Post-AR interview. Therefore I asked the participating teachers in cycle two would they feel comfortable recording their reflections on an online blog, which would only be visible to participants. The intention was that each participant could read other participants' contributions and respond through the blog to them. All teachers individually agreed, expressing no strong feelings in favour of either method. The Google Sites application connected to the school's domain name was used to create a blog called 'Learn Where We Teach' on which I and participating teachers had a page each. This facilitated staying in touch with the various classroom projects throughout the term as I could log in after school hours when there was time to read and respond to contributions. The change to blog entries along with the inclusion of the collaborative discussion group improved engagement in cycle two and contributed to the generation of research data.

Data Generated in the Core Cycle

Six sources of data were generated during these two cycles of action research. Interview transcripts from both the Pre-AR and Post-AR interviews constituted two valuable sources in which teachers' perspectives before and after the action research were captured. The Pre-AR interviews captured their reflections on their own experience of education and childhood along with their perspectives on teaching in

Oakwood Primary School. These interviews provided a window into the shared habitus that facilitates schooling and indicated the cultural capital acquired and valued by the participants. The Post-AR interviews generated data about what the teachers said they had learned from engaging in the action research project, which raised questions for some of them about their previous assumptions. The teacher reflections, some recorded in diaries but the majority on the 'Learn Where We Teach' blog generated a third source of data.

Data generated by the collaborative group discussion produced insights at a midway point in the process, informed my facilitative role. My reflective diary that captured the fluctuating uncertainty and hope experienced as a researcher researching in one's own work place is a fifth data source. The issues of positionality feature throughout. Lastly, it is mandatory for teachers to compile a monthly progress report on their work completed each month. These reports constitute the sixth source of data, but they did not place extra demands on teachers outside of their usual practice. The reports indicated if the action research had influenced their practice when they were not specifically focussed on the project. Overall, the use of multiple data sources adds to the rigour and validity of the research and contributes to triangulation. Triangulation is defined as "the use of more than one source of data in the study of some social phenomenon so that findings may be cross checked" (Bryman, 2012, 17).

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the characteristics of action research as an approach to inquiry and the rationale for using it to gain an understanding of teachers' current perceptions about teaching and learning in Oakwood PS. It outlined the design of an intervention project aimed at facilitating the use of children's local cultural influences and experiences by teachers in learning activities in school. It detailed the personal and collaborative learning of the evolving design by differentiating between the core and reflective cycles of action research. The reflective cycle incorporated the continuation of self-study which had begun before this core stage of action research. The analysis of data generated will be outlined in chapter five after the initial findings are shared in the next chapter. These initial findings suggest that action research can support teachers' ability to recognise the knowledge children from

diverse backgrounds have acquired from their home environments. They also indicate that the research design was suitable for exploring the influences of habitus on teachers' practice.

Chapter 4: Findings of Second-Person Action Research

Introduction

This chapter presents a descriptive account of the findings which emerged from second-person action research with colleagues in Oakwood PS. It includes a comprehensive report based on data generated through interviews with participants and in their reflective writing. It is organised to reflect the chronology of the research process and to answer the research questions that emerged from engagement with Bourdieu's theoretical framework. There are six sections in the chapter. Section one explores participants' habitus and the cultural capital acquired from their families which influenced their socialisation for school. It suggests that engagement in Initial Teacher Education in Ireland did not alter their perceptions or prepare them adequately for teaching in disadvantaged contexts. Section two reports on their perceptions of practice as experienced teachers in Oakwood PS. It explores their interpretation of the curriculum and constraints on its translation to practice. Section three transitions to PLACE, the classroom intervention, and reports on learning from cycle one which informed its second cycle. It sets the scene for section four which outlines what participants learned from and about their pupils through engagement in PLACE. It includes the opportunities and challenges participants reported from the experience. Their evaluation of the process is outlined in section five. It presents evidence of participants' agency based on their judgements. The final section compares their perceptions before and after engagement in PLACE and suggests that action research is a suitable approach for uncovering the knowledge children acquire from their cultural background not previously recognised in participants' practice.

Participants' recollections of their primary schooling

The first part of the interview discussion focussed directly on the six participants' memories of their own schooling, starting with primary school. When asked about the primary school they attended, all except Hannah began with a description of the school, its size, location, number of teachers and pupils. Hannah began by stating that she loved school and recounted the excitement of starting school and her completely positive attitude to it from the beginning. Eimear and Gillian also recounted positive memories stating that "*my memories of primary school are very happy ones, I had great friends and great teachers*", (Eimear) and "*overall I have*

pretty positive memories and experiences of primary school"(Gillian). While Denise described her primary school experience as positive overall and that she "*loved primary school as well*"[as secondary], her positive experiences in primary school relate to only one teacher, in a two teacher school. Anna began by stating that primary school was "*lovely, I really enjoyed it*", but later in the discussion she too referred to fearing the second teacher in her two teacher school[9]. Laura's recounts were mixed and while she described the teachers as kind but strict, she remembers being unhappy and feeling inadequate, when compared with her older sister.

Denominational Education

Four of the teachers incidentally referred to the interrelated role the Church assumed in their schooling. Anna's extracurricular activities included preparation for choir in Church ceremonies. Denise described how she had to remember to bring the leaflet from Sunday's Mass with her to school every Monday as proof of attendance at the Church ceremony. Anna, Denise and Hannah had attended rural schools whereas the other three participants attended primary schools in small towns which they described as convent schools. Gillian described it as follows:

> *The school was very close to the church and I remember the local priest visiting the school quite often and there were always at least two nuns teaching in the school. Some of my teachers were nuns and we would have observed Holy days or religious days. There were a lot of events around St Patrick's Day and St Brigid's Day was always marked. Around First Communion, Corpus Christi, you'd take part in the procession in your communion dress ... So those occasions would have been a big part of school life.*

Memories of Teachers

When recollecting their childhood experiences participants spoke about the teachers who taught them. Many of their narratives concerned affective aspects of their experience with teachers. Three of the participants had definite memories of particular teachers who impacted positively on their school days. Anna credits her teacher, Miss Farrell (a pseudonym) as the most influential person in her life:

> *She would have been the main influence who got me to where I am today. She just had a way of having a nice relationship with all the*

[9] Traditionally, each parish had its own primary school. In rural areas these were often small, two teacher schools.

> *children. I even remember going home and telling Mum I wanted to be like Miss Farrell.*

Anna was taught by Miss Farrell when she was between six and eight years of age and remembers knowing she wanted to be a teacher from the age of six. Similarly Denise speaks highly of her first teacher, "*she had such a lovely way with her ....., because she did make a difference*". Denise chose her Initial Teacher Education (ITE) college on the basis of knowing where this teacher had attended college. Hannah also spoke about a particular teacher, "*I remember 3rd and 4th class and I remember her as clear as day and I suppose going into teaching I wanted to be like her. She made us feel important".* All three of these participants, remembered how a teacher related to them as children and how valued they felt, and unprompted, all three of them connected this teacher to their decision to pursue a teaching career.

On the other hand Laura does not remember an influential teacher from primary school, but does remember being punished for "*giddiness*" and "*being talkative"*. She recalled feeling embarrassed in primary school as she was not good at certain activities and also described resisting those activities (craft) by "*forgetting on purpose"* to bring them with her to school.

Both Anna and Denise also recounted negative experiences with another teacher in their respective primary schools, which in both cases followed on from their positive experiences. As Anna said:

> *Because there was a very old style principal and I know a few people would have been afraid of going in there because she would have been very cross and very old style, shouted a lot, shouted in your face a lot.*

Denise had a similar memory of dreading the second teacher:

> *And when you were in 2nd class, you dreaded going into 3rd class because you would hear the roars and shouts through the door and you'd know what was ahead of you.*

Gillian's mother taught in the primary school Gillian attended, but had died following a short aggressive illness before Gillian completed secondary school. Gillian did not remember having a definite decision about a career choice but acknowledged that

> *It [primary teacher] wouldn't have been on my list, only that she* [her mother] *was, and I knew what it was about and I kind of knew what the life of a teacher was like at that stage.*

Coincidently Eimear's mother had died when Eimear was only nine years of age. Subsequently two of Eimear's aunts who were both teachers became very involved in supporting Eimear's father in raising his children. Eimear remembers their role as very influential and recounted:

> *I used always be over and back to different schools in the evening, that's how close we all were. I'd hop in the car and I'd go with one aunt to [town A] and then to [town B]. We'd be in classrooms in the evening and I'd see all the activities and the set up of a classroom and I used to have great interest in it.*

She ascribes her decision to pursue a teaching career to their influence and to the *"good teachers"* who had taught her.

Of the five participants who referred to positive teacher role models, two of those role models were members of their own family, reflective of the research findings in Ireland. Drudy et al (2005) found that school leavers who had family members as teachers were significantly more likely than others to consider primary teaching as a career. In a study of ITE students who were in their second academic year, 60% had a near relative who was a teacher (Drudy et al, 2005, 83). In addition four of the participants in this research came from farming backgrounds. This reflects a pattern unchanged since the 1970's with over 80% of teachers coming from farming and professional or white collar backgrounds (Drudy and Lynch, 1993). Current findings show that in total three-quarters of primary ITE entrants have fathers in the farm, employer/manager or professional groups with 35% having mothers who are teachers (Darmody and Smyth, 2016). These statistics suggest that many teachers who work in disadvantaged urban schools are different in social background from the children they teach. In itself that is not at issue, rather it is teacher awareness of the background influences on their socialisation into the education system that is of interest.

Supports for learning in their childhoods

When reflecting on factors in their childhoods that had supported their learning and development, five of the teachers talked definitively about the supportive role played

by their parents or other family members. Education was viewed as important and parents actively helped their children, as Hannah explained:

> *When we came in from school we had our dinner and then you'd start your homework. And nothing else happened until that was done. It was important that that happened and it was the same routine every single day.*

Similarly, Denise remembered:

> *Every evening, homework was done, it was done right, and we were sat down at the kitchen table...it was very much a case of 'we are going to educate these children and give them the best chance.*

Eimear and Anna described identical scenarios concerning homework, whereas Gillian remembers it as *"part of her reality"*. She does not think that it ever occurred to her not to do her homework as it was expected and part of the day.

Whilst Gillian's mother worked as a teacher in the primary school Gillian attended which she feels connected school and home in her life, both Anna and Denise explained the voluntary work their mothers did to support the primary school, which included serving on the Board of Management (BOM) for the entire time their children attended the school. In addition Anna's mother voluntarily assisted in the school by providing extra supervision with children on school trips or as Anna said: *"If they needed parents to help, she would have been there to help, especially at the junior end"*.

All six teachers spoke about attending extra-curricular activities such as music and dance lessons for which their parents paid. All of them also remember having plenty of reading material. Eimear talked about how she was brought to places of historical and cultural interest by her aunts and Gillian recalls how her father bought extra study desks to facilitate all seven children in the family having a space in which to study. Denise credits her father with the extra help he gave her when she was with the aforementioned senior teacher of whom she was afraid:

> *I remember finding maths quite difficult as I went up the school and I'd be afraid to go into school the next day because back then, if you had a sum wrong in your homework- God help you*[10]*. Dad would sit down with me and I have to say he was brilliant, he'd explain it to me.*

[10] 'God help you' is an idiom which means someone faced a daunting situation with no means of support, apart from divine intervention.

Laura on the other hand does not feel her parents had a major role in her education: "*No I don't think they were majorly involved. Again I think we* [Laura and her siblings] *did it ourselves"*. However she also recounted how her mother managed to pay for extra-curricular activities and provided all the resources needed, despite having limited finances, reflecting how one may not recognise the supports one takes for granted. It would appear that the participants' parents inculcated the knowledge, skills and behaviour required to develop in their children the attitudes and understandings or cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) required for success in school.

Experience of Initial Teacher Education

Data suggested that these participants had entered the teaching profession with a view that teaching was socially desirable and respected. Whilst it is acknowledged that it is difficult to generalise why people choose a teaching career existing research points towards a combination of extrinsic, intrinsic and altruistic motives (Darmody and Smyth, 2016,14), with socialisation factors considered highly influential (Richardson et al. 2014).

In Ireland teaching has remained a popular career choice resulting in strong competition for places (McGuire, 2014; Darmody and Smyth, 2016). There is some variation in the type of education and training provided mainly, concurrent (undergraduate) and consecutive (postgraduate) courses. Due to the competition for limited places in Initial Teacher Education (ITE), previously many aspiring teachers choose to engage in ITE abroad. For those who choose this option an Irish Language Requirement condition applies for registration to teach in primary schools in Ireland. They either complete an Aptitude Test (SCG; An Scrúdú le hAghaidh Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge) or an Adaptation Period (OCG; Oiriúnú le hAghaidh Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge), (Darmody and Smyth, 2016, 70). The participants in this research between them had taken the three different options of ITE.

Eimear stated that though she *"always wanted to do primary teaching*", she was deterred from applying by her Career Guidance teacher in secondary school as she might not have succeeded in the application process. This reflects the perception of the competitive nature of the process while revealing Eimear's compliant attitude to the authority of teachers' to make judgements about students' choices. However after

completing a Degree in Business and working for a few years she continued to think she *"had sold herself short"* and returned as a mature student to complete a concurrent course in ITE. Two of the participants had proceeded directly from secondary school to ITE in Ireland. Another one engaged in ITE in England and the other two completed an Arts Degree, followed by post-graduate ITE course in Ireland. When asked about their experience of ITE, only Hannah [ITE in England] considered she had been well prepared for her role as a newly qualified teacher, capable of engaging with a diverse range of children, families and contexts. She recounted how her first year in ITE was particularly difficult but the support of mentor teachers throughout the period combined with course work enabled her to develop her practice.

> *I think it prepared me quite well really. It was hard, I remember first year, I think the first teaching practice, and it was just so difficult. I remember it been so hard, just a real shock wave. Now it was made harder because I had come from the Irish system and I was training in the English system. It was a huge cultural change. There was so much to get used of, it was a mix of lots of factors, and it was difficult.* (Hannah)

In contrast the teachers who had experience of ITE in Ireland remembered it differently. As Gillian says:

> *I don't think it really prepared you for the reality of teaching. There was a lot of theory. We did teaching practice but that was in a very sheltered, propped up way and I don't think it really prepared you for the reality.*

Implicit in Gillian's comment is the disconnection between her experience of ITE and her subsequent experience as a newly qualified teacher in a school which catered for children from diverse backgrounds. The other four participants who engaged in ITE in Ireland also referred to a lack of attention to diversity issues in their studies. The following comment by Denise was echoed by Eimear, Laura and Anna in their interviews: "*Absolutely not! No diversity. No, nothing, even EAL* [English as an Additional Language] *wasn't touched upon".* (Denise). Three of the participants specifically stated that their ITE course did not include education about or for the Traveller community, though Travellers are an indigenous minority group within Irish society for over a millennium (Watson et al., 2017).

However, Gillian reflected:

> *At the time I thought I was studying it and I knew what they were talking about but it was really regurgitating what was given to us at lectures. And even when I started working I really didn't make any connections between what I was doing and what I had learned in either psychology or sociology or with any of that theory. I didn't see any links between the two. I suppose if I went back now and studied sociology I would look at it with very different eyes.*

It appears from data that participants' engagement in ITE in Ireland complemented their existing perceptions about teaching. Those perceptions were based on their early socialisation in school, strengthened by supportive family and community settings.

Moreover those who experienced ITE in Ireland report that they would have appreciated more observation of experienced teachers and more engagement in teaching practice during the period. "*The teaching practice is one thing that could have been a little bit longer. A day a week in a school would have been better"* (Denise). This desire for more practice was expressed by three other participants. It was supported by an equally common criticism by them that too much emphasis had been on theory. Anna's comment "*there was an awful lot of theory"* was reiterated emphatically by three other participants. The participants' reflections on ITE indicated a theory practice dichotomy, suggesting theory was related to gaining the qualification to practice rather than underpinning it. While only one of the participants had studied abroad, her perception of theory expressed an appreciation of its value with practice "*you would have looked at the theory behind the curriculum",* though her ITE also included more extensive practical experience in schools under the mentorship of experienced teachers. She emphasised the benefits of mentoring during ITE but indicated the quality of the experience depended on numerous factors. These included the relationship between the student and mentor and level of support available to both from ITE providers and school management. However her experience suggested theory and practice were interrelated during ITE, and became more meaningful for her in the 3rd and 4th year of the course. She indicated that theory had supported her as she struggled in an experience which she described as *'a huge cultural change'.*

Whilst the teachers with ITE experience in Ireland were retrospectively critical of the preparatory process they did not recall the level of difficulty Hannah recounts from her experience. Eimear summarised it as follows:

> *It [ITE] informed you, it informed you on the curriculum and maybe, ok, the layout of the curriculum, it gave you methodologies. It was very broad; there was nothing very specific in the way we were trained. So it meant a lot of it, you'd have to find out; you'd have to think on your feet and learn from experience.*

The ITE courses referred to span a period of two decades from the early 1990's to 2010 and the recollections of ITE in Ireland, whether as undergraduate or postgraduate students, over this period are striking in their similarities. Given that their ITE courses were in the past, it is possible that their recollections were coloured by their subsequent experience of beginning their teaching career.

Early Career Teaching in a Disadvantaged School

Three of the participants, Gillian, Denise and Eimear were appointed to Oakwood PS immediately after completing their ITE, while Laura and Anna worked as substitute teachers in various schools for over a year before appointment. Hannah worked abroad and in short term positions in Ireland before appointment to this school. It has been found that over half of teachers in disadvantaged schools have less than five years experience compared with 27% of teachers in other schools (McCoy et al., 2014, 320), reflecting a trend that experienced teachers move on from disadvantaged schools which more frequently creates vacancies which are filled by less experienced teachers. It also implies that experienced teachers appear not to choose to move into disadvantaged schools. While it is notable that four of the participants have worked in Oakwood for thirteen years or more, it also needs to be said that currently it is difficult to change schools, voluntarily, due to DES supply regulations. However all of them began teaching in Oakwood Primary when they were early career teachers (ECTs).

When asked about their first impressions of Oakwood Primary School, only two participants, Gillian and Hannah referred to their first impressions as being of the children, Gillian spoke of her 'shock' at having an infant class that in no way matched her expectations following her own primary school experience and preparation during ITE. She remembers thinking *"I've made such a terrible mistake"* and while

figuring out how to get through each day also did not want other staff members to know she was struggling *"because I was a trained teacher, therefore I should know how to do all of this"*. She struggled to communicate with parents and manage her class in what were at the time poor physical working conditions. Her vivid recollections of first impressions span her first year in the school and she is still surprised at how happy she felt when the head teacher at the time asked her to reapply at the end of the year for a permanent position in the school.

Hannah on the other hand had experienced many different contexts in her ITE abroad and recalled her first impressions of Oakwood PS:

> *I suppose it was excitement really, I was so glad to be coming in after being out subbing for so long. To have a class and have that responsibility back. To have children I could actually spend time with, relate to and things like that. And I remember just the first few days thinking the kids are just lovely. They really were, they were friendly, they were just nice, they were very helpful. There were a few laughs here and there. Kids are kids. There was nothing out of the ordinary at all. The staff was incredibly friendly and incredibly welcoming.*

Whilst these two first impressions are extremely different, there is almost twenty years between their occurrences. Gillian had commenced teaching in Oakwood immediately after completing ITE, whereas Hannah had experience in a variety of different contexts.

The other four participants spoke about supportive colleagues when asked about their first impressions of the school. Gillian featured in Laura's account of her first impressions:

> *She [Gillian] was very supportive and I'd come to this town, moved in and hadn't even a clue where the school was. But she took me under her wing and supported me.*

The other three participants also referred to other staff members and a supportive atmosphere as constituents of their first impressions, reflecting a continuation of their previously articulated preference for learning from experienced teachers during ITE.

Even with support Laura found teaching in Oakwood difficult: "*I found it tough and I just wanted to keep them [the children] under control"*. Whilst Laura suggested that her relocation to the town explains her lack of prior knowledge of the school before

she started working here, Denise who lived in the same county in which the school is located recounted:

> *I would never have thought this was a disadvantaged area. After my first week here it really hit home how disadvantaged some of the children in front of me were. It was crazy. It was such a shock.*

In the interview conversation she immediately went on to speak about her first impressions of the school building, resources and other staff members all of which she described as positive. This was a missed opportunity on my part as I did not probe with her what exactly she meant by 'disadvantaged'. Afterwards when replaying the audio recording I realised I had just assumed I understood what she meant in a conversation about a shared context, but became more aware of my assumptions for subsequent interviews. In the ensuing interviews, when participants were specifically asked about their first encounters with the children, two suggested there were *"challenges*" but were disinclined to be specific at that stage of the conversation. Responsive interviewing respects participants' rights to equal participation in the conversation (Rubin and Rubin, 2005) so I did not pursue issues if participants appeared reluctant to engage. Throughout all of the conversations, Gillian was the only teacher who elaborated on the challenges she perceived as an ECT and at the time of this first interview.

> *And even though the kids are coming in and they are in uniform and they are in a nice clean bright building. It is still very noticeable on them physically and emotionally, where they're coming from. So you have kids that are dirty, kids that are tired, kids that are hungry, who are dishevelled, who are really badly organised, not through any of their own fault, but they have difficulty minding stuff. There are things that go on outside of school that affect them in class, elements of criminality in families, there are situations where parents are, there may be addictions in the house, huge financial constraints. There may be family feuds going on. All these things still impact our children, even though they are sitting in a nice bright classroom that is made as welcoming as possible, the school is made as welcoming as possible, those things are still very obvious.*

As the interview conversations progressed all participants shared their perspectives on challenges they experienced in their practice, which revealed their perceptions of the children they taught based on their deficit perceptions of parental engagement in children's education. It will therefore be documented in the later section on teachers' views about parents. Of interest here, is the reluctance or inability of most

participants to articulate their perception of what disadvantage means. Only one teacher explicated her perception of the specific challenges encountered by children attending a disadvantaged school. The reluctance or incapacity of the other participants to do likewise reflects the societal ambiguity which surrounds issues of disadvantage in Irish educational discourse (O'Sullivan, 2005)

What Supported Participants' Continuous Professional Development?

The previous section outlined some of the difficulties participants encountered in the transition from student teacher to ECT in Oakwood PS. This section considers participants' practice as more experienced teachers and their perceptions of that trajectory from ECT onwards in recognition that learning teaching takes years following qualification to teach (Delaney, 2017). Three themes emerged in the responses of participants when they were asked about the factors that have supported their learning since they began teaching. All of the participants referred to the advice from and observation of more experienced teachers as highly supportive, with three teachers identifying it as most supportive of their learning, "*the most important one would be the support of colleagues and that would be through advice and just watching what people do" (Gillian).*

Three participants identified their own experience of teaching as the most important constituent of their learning captured in Denise's words "*a lot of what I've learned is just from day to day, being on the ground and working with children and colleagues and having to find out*". However both of these themes were interlinked as advice from and discussion with colleagues preceded or followed experience. One participant, Eimear, who initially identified staff colleagues as most supportive, also identified engagement in continuous professional development (CPD) as beneficial for her learning as a teacher. It was surprising that only one teacher voluntarily suggested CPD as beneficial to her learning considering the emphasis placed on CPD for teachers in the previous decade (Loxley et al., 2007; King, 2012; DES, 2011).

Participants' Perceptions of Continuous Professional Development

That CPD was not acknowledged by five of the participants as a learning support for them appeared surprising initially for three main reasons. Firstly, since 2005 the emphasis of the DEIS initiative prioritised CPD for teaching staff in participating

schools, to develop an understanding of educational inclusion and promote improved pedagogical practice (DES, 2005, 61). Staff in Oakwood PS had engaged in a diverse range of CPD, which included CPD delivered on-site in the school by members of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). In addition staff members had attended specific CPD courses delivered off-site to clusters of school, by PDST. In some cases all teachers had participated and in other cases the school was required to nominate a teacher for CPD, who was tasked with disseminating the information to the remaining staff, in what is known as a cascade model of CPD (Kennedy, 2005, 240). Secondly, following the publication and implementation of the 'Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life' (DES, 2011), a renewed emphasis was placed on CPD for all teachers by the DES. 20 hours of mandatory CPD was introduced for teachers every five years as a means of enhancing teacher practices to enable improved literacy and numeracy outcomes (King, 2012,16), with corresponding changes in the content of CPD available (DES, 2011, 36). Thirdly, these six participants were members of a school staff whose engagement in CPD was acknowledged by DES inspectors in a Whole School Evaluation (WSE) report as follows "The quality of teaching is greatly enhanced by the very high level of continuing professional development undertaken by individual teachers" (WSE Inspection Report, DES, January 2014). In the context of Oakwood PS it was a revelation that only one participant voluntarily suggested that CPD had enhanced her learning as a teacher. It raised the question of how the other participants perceived CPD in relation to their practice.

In all of the interviews participants were asked if CPD had supported their learning about teaching following their induction as ECTs into the profession. Denise responded that she found the CPD that had whole staff engagement as "*useful*", particularly if it was held onsite as *"it doesn't really work unless everyone is doing it"*. She herself participated in additional CPD available outside of school time, when her personal life allowed for it. Denise was asked specifically about CPD associated with a literacy programme available to all DEIS schools for which she was Oakwood's nominated teacher. Though she agreed she "*did it*" she immediately went on to speak about CPD she had chosen to do to help her understand the learning needs of a child with SEN in her class a number of years previously. She spoke about

the value of what she learned for meeting the child's needs at the time, but also in subsequent years with other children.

In a similar vein Gillian and Hannah both spoke at length about the CPD they had engaged with outside of the prescribed courses for DEIS schools, one in the use of ICT in the classroom and the other in SEN. Both suggested that their engagement in CPD had enhanced their ability to reflect on their practice, though developing reflective capacity was not their initial intention. Gillian explained:

> *I didn't do it to become a more reflective practitioner , I did it because I was really interested in technology and it just happened to align with something that happened in my classroom the previous year and I thought it was something that would excite me and motivate me.*

Anna and Laura both appeared to interpret the term CPD as something they did outside of school in their own time as neither referred to the whole school CPD they had availed of. In particular they referred to engagement in summer courses for one week of their holidays which entitles the teacher to three extra personal leave (EPV) days in the following school year. Anna's comment suggested her dissatisfaction with CPD she had engaged in when she said *"I suppose there is a lot of theory. You can only take so much from them"*. Laura spoke of her dissatisfaction with online courses, available from various DES endorsed providers. She missed the face-to-face interaction and discussion she experienced previously with other participants, but said her personal circumstances prohibited her attendance at summer schools.

The six participants held varying perspectives on the extent to which CPD supported their learning. Teachers spoke more enthusiastically and at length about CPD which they voluntarily elected to do in response to their own requirements in meeting children's learning needs or capacities. They suggested it had affected changes in their thinking about practice. CPD provided in response to DEIS requirements elicited more perfunctory responses as in Eimear's "*we've had loads of opportunities to do different courses"*, or Denise's *"useful"*. However neither participant expanded their response in relation to their own learning. Both associated this CPD with DES requirements for practice in the school. In both cases the value of this CPD was the opportunity it presented for staff discussion in deciding how the requirements could be practiced in the school. There appears to be a distinction drawn in the participants' responses between the CPD which is useful and that which is considered less than

useful from a practice perspective but required for EPV days. This does not imply that all summer CPD provision eligible for EPV days is evaluated similarly by teachers.

The question was posed in relation to their learning as teachers which presumably limited their responses to their interpretation of both learning and CPD. From their responses it does appear that CPD which was self-initiated was considered more worthwhile than CPD prescribed by the DES for these participants. On the other hand the prescribed CPD engendered a sense of security that the school was complying with requirements when staff implemented the proposed programmes. How staff interpretation of recommended practice aligned with the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999) was the next area explored in the interview conversations.

Interpretation of the Primary School Curriculum in Oakwood PS

The Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999) gives teachers and schools in Ireland the professional flexibility, responsibility and challenge of providing an educational experience, relevant and dedicated to the individual needs of children, within a clear and structured national framework. The principles underpinning the curriculum envisage the active engagement of the child in the learning process and explicitly state that the child's language, prior learning and cultural background constitutes the context for learning (DES, 1999, 8), with the teacher acting as a "facilitator and guide who interprets the child's learning needs and responds to them" (DES, 1999, 20). Currently the curriculum is in the process of further revision and the Language Curriculum [English and Irish] is in the early process of implementation. While its structure is changed the underpinning principles remain unchanged and it aims to "enable children to build on prior knowledge and experience of language and language learning to enhance their language learning" (DES, 2016, 26). These principles assume that teachers have knowledge and understanding of children's prior knowledge or have strategies to learn about their pupils' lives outside school. The next three questions asked of the participants explored this assumption.

Learning about the Children's Interests

When the participants were asked about their pupils' interests, three participants talked about aspects of children's lives in the community. Eimear's response captures it as follows:

> *They love talking about their own environment, their own families, and their wider circle on the street, their neighbours, people in their community. They love talking about those kinds of things. Places that they go to, events that happen in the area.*

Three participants did not allude to aspects of children's lives outside of school. Denise confined her response to 'school topics' and whilst she began by talking about what her pupils were not interested in she continued:

> *They love the SESE [Social, Environmental and Science Education] subjects; they enjoy everyday things, projects, things that are of relevance to them. They like doing 'transport' or 'communications' things like that. They like those topics. ...they love the art and it's great for them all to get these opportunities. P.E as well...*

Laura and Anna also confined their responses to activities that were school related and spoke about the extra-curricular activities that Oakwood PS provided for children during lunch-break and after-school which included sports, art, music and technology. Whether or not the participants interpreted the question differently, three acknowledged the children's lives outside of school in their response, whereas three did not.

When asked how they ascertained the children's interests, teachers all stated that they found out through conversations with the children, mainly during informal school time, before class started and break time. Oral language classes were also considered a good time to hear the children. In the senior classes Denise said that children wrote about their interests and that *"you can really gauge what they are interested in from looking at their response"* [to the activity they were engaged in].

When asked about how they included children's interests into their learning plans, data suggests that teachers working in Infant classes found it easier to incorporate children's interests into curricular related activities. Gillian and Hannah both spoke of how the structure of the Infant day allowed for flexibility and that often play-related, writing, art and drama activities were stimulated from topics the children introduced. This is not to suggest that either teacher found this to be without tension:

> *We spend all the rest of the day trying to lead them down a particular path to get to a certain objective all the time. We are in charge of the conversation and we are leading it all the time, whereas that informal time in the morning they lead that.* (Gillian, Infant Teacher)

> *That takes time for a lot of people. In a classroom that has 22 children with so many different needs and abilities and you have to get so many things done on a daily basis as well, you just don't have the time and that's one of the main barriers.* (Hannah, Infant Teacher)

Other participants appeared to believe that they were incorporating children's prior knowledge into school activities when the strategies they described appeared to align with their interpretation of what the children would find interesting. Denise described it as follows:

> *And I find the topics I put up, some children are totally drawn to a topic like that. So that would be one strategy I use. I'd put up a varied list of topics.*

Eimear also planned the topics in advance and stated:

> *We always start most topics with, you ask for their own experiences, and straight away, through that kind of feedback you might be able to feed into other strategies that you can use. I nearly always start with the child's own experiences, where possible.*

Laura spoke about planning activities that suited children's interests but that they may not get to do at home such as building with construction materials or using computer assisted maths games. Anna used 'Show and Tell' as a strategy to develop children's oral language fluency, question posing and answering skills. While all of the participants demonstrated that they made concerted efforts to create what they considered stimulating environments which would interest their pupils, in some cases they preselected the topics for study from which the children chose.

In the interview conversation all six participants responded affirmatively to using strategies which incorporated children's interests into their teaching plans, when in some cases what they described of their practice suggested they planned what they considered interesting for children indicative of a possible distinction between what we think we do and what we actually do (Larrivee, 2000). On reflection the participants were speaking to the head teacher and may have inclined to answer a question affirmatively rather than challenge the basis of the question, depending on their view of the hierarchical situation within the school (Anderson et al., 2007). I was oblivious to these power issues at the design stage of this research and perceived myself as an insider doing research with colleagues. Understanding developed along a continuum throughout the research process as I moved from a subjective

perspective to a more intersubjective one which was borne in mind during analysis. When asked what constraints they perceived in connecting school work with children's lived experiences, participants raised multiple dilemmas.

Constraints on Practice from Participants' Perspectives

The main constraints participants raised related to lack of time. However the perception of lack of time is interwoven with four recurring themes in the data: pressure to cover the curriculum, identification of self as 'good teacher', deficit views of pupils' parents and finally the culturally induced socio-economic divide.

Denise who taught a senior class regularly referred to *"lack of time"* and *"pressure*" as the main reasons why she found it difficult to incorporate children's interests more:

> *Definitely time because by the time in your week you have got to maths and English and geography and whatever you have to do and often things are carried over from week to week, you have no time really to sit down and say 'that little group over there, they are mad about a certain topic; I'd love to make them a nice project on that'. You'd love to do that but you just wouldn't have the time to do it.*

Her perception was reiterated in data generated with other participants; Anna said: *"The curriculum is so detailed and you are under a lot of time pressure to get it completed as well"*. This was a common perception amongst the participants, though the actual curriculum does not contain a prescriptive list of content but rather a selection of topics and areas from which to choose in order to develop the skills required for continuous learning (DES, 1999). Data suggests that content and strategies prioritised by CPD providers stemming from DEIS (2005) and the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011) were interpreted by teachers as curriculum content.

Interwoven in this perception of curriculum and time pressure was an implicit desire of teachers to be 'good teachers' which posed dilemmas for them captured in Denise's words:

> *You are looking at all the material you have to do, and you as a teacher have to prove that you are doing all this, and I'd love to do what they are interested in but I can't because I have to do this, this and this*.

The proof Denise referred to was to show evidence of curriculum coverage with her class each year. Similar pressure to "*give them the skills"* required to progress

through the educational system were expressed by Hannah and Eimear as children are expected to "*retain an awful lot of knowledge and have good study skills"* (Eimear). Participants spoke of the responsibility for ensuring the children had the skills and knowledge required for assessment at entry to second level education, reflecting what Biesta (2015) refers to as an emphasis on the qualification domain of education which stresses the acquisition of the knowledge, skills and dispositions to enable progression in the education system. Past pupils who had previously not performed well on this assessment had been placed in low attaining classes, in which they appeared to have limited subject choice and fewer opportunities. Disappointment was expressed in two instances in which past pupils who had been considered very able did not complete secondary school. Implicit in the disappointment was that those past pupils had ruled themselves out of *"good jobs"* because they and their parents did not understand "*what education could do for them"* (Eimear). This difficulty was associated with a perception of a lack of parental engagement in children's education, which participants felt increased the pressure on them to compensate in school for this deficit by focussing on literacy and numeracy skills, captured in Gillian's dilemma:

> *You want to make sure that you are giving enough time to getting their writing done because at the end of the day, they still need lots and lots of practice with writing and with their reading. You need to get time to hear them read and support them in their reading and figure out where they are and what do I need to do with them next.*

Participants regularly used terms such as "*I have to*", or "*need to*" when discussing the obligations they perceived they had towards children's education. While these obligations related mainly to the first domain of qualification, there was also emphasis on the socialisation domain in which children are initiated into the traditions and ways of being and doing (Biesta, 2015) of the education system. Participants mainly expressed the idea that parental involvement was necessary for socialisation purposes**.**

Participants' Perceptions of Children's Parents

Parents, who are recognised as the child's primary educators (Constitution of Ireland, 1937) were not mentioned by any of the participants in this research as providing a source of information or background knowledge about their children's interests or concerns, which could reflect the lack of opportunity teachers have to talk with

parents. Participant perceptions about their pupils' parents reflected their own childhood experience or habitus in which parental support for education was visibly highly valued. Five participants referenced their own parents' commitment to their education as a comparison for what they perceived as a deficit in support for their pupils. They mainly expressed the idea that without parental engagement in children's education, those children had less educational opportunities "*if you don't have the parents behind you to give them that extra little push, I do feel that children aren't going to do as well"* (Denise). Their references about pupils' parents can be categorised into two main groups: parents who lacked the skills and knowledge to help their children and parents who did not value education. Some participants expressed both categories, while also empathising with the difficulties some families encountered.

Four participants expressed the view that their pupils' parents lacked the skills needed to adequately support their children's education because of circumstances beyond their control, including financial constraints, lack of time, educational attainment and social background. Gillian was of the opinion that some parents viewed school as the teacher's domain and that parents did not realise their influence on children's engagement in school. She also acknowledged that some parents considered teaching as the teacher's job and they were justified in thinking "*I have enough going on in my life, you know, go and do your job".*

Three participants suggested that some parents did not value education exemplified in the following statement:

> *I do hear it from different parents, why would you do that [engage in education], wouldn't you make as much on the dole? Not even a value on education as a means to finding employment. It's "I know what is going to happen to me". Not all of them are like that, but a core group of parents that we work with, it's nearly predetermined, they know what's going to happen when they reach a certain age, what they are entitled to. Now that's very negative.*

While that participant perceived her view as negative, she was honestly expressing her sense of frustration with a situation based on different values to her own, reflecting a society characterised by conflicting values, unequal distribution of resources and power (Herr and Anderson, 2005, 4). Her comment revealed the power

of habitus in the formation of values, and the capacity of values to inhibit understanding of their formation and block intersubjective understanding.

The deficit attitudes about parents are similar to findings of research aimed at identifying issues related to educational disadvantage in Ireland in 2002, where teachers cited the home environment and parental involvement as most the most influential factor impacting on children's learning opportunities (Zappone, 2002, 29). It has been argued that the trend towards the normalisation of 'concerted cultivation' (with parents responsible for the development of the children's intellectual, social, cultural, physical and emotional skills as a parenting strategy) is accelerating and, as a result, there is a risk that parents not able to engage in such activities will be positioned as offering inadequate parenting (Vincent and Maxwell, 2016, 273-278). The combination of societal approval for concerted cultivation and personal memories in which parents assumed a supportive role in education no doubt influenced participants' expectations about parental involvement in their children's education. In their practice they emphasised and spent time developing the core literacy and numeracy skills they felt children needed to make progress within the education system at the expense of a curriculum more inclusive of children's cultural background and interests, for which they did not have time.

Socio-economic divide

Eimear identified another aspect of the difficulty associated with lack of time which related to the low socio-economic area in which the school is situated. Referring to the challenges she perceived in incorporating children's interests into school work she suggested:

> *I think it would be time and finding information. If something is localised to such an extent, you are not going to access that information, by googling or whatever, you might have to go out and find someone who knows it. Because you have premade resources, you have information in a book, or it's ready online or it's there at the click of a button, it probably would take a little bit more effort to take something that the child is interested in, and then go and prepare say teaching experiences based on that.*

When asked if that was a particular challenge, Eimear replied:

> *Well that has to be a challenge, ok, because you have to find out, if somebody is interested in [pause], an individual or a local building,*

> *some aspect of the locality, the river, something that is just in the area, well then you have to go and do a good bit of research.*

Eimear's articulation of this challenge was alluded to in data provided by some other participants. Some participants were not aware of many aspects of the locality or local community which militates against the realisation of the underpinning principles of the curriculum. None of the teachers in question (or any of the school staff) live in the community served by this school. As a consequence their only engagement in activities in the community relate to their role as teachers in the school. Teaching in Oakwood PS has become a 'commuter profession', as observed over a decade ago in the US (Moll and Arnot-Hopffer, 2005). Teachers' opportunities to get to know parents or the school's community are scarce.

Participants' Sense of Agency

It was evident during the interviews that participants perceived difficulties for the educational prospects of many of the children in Oakwood Primary School. When asked for their suggestions to improve those prospects, varying levels of perceived agency was evident in their responses. Agency refers to the idea that professionals such as "teachers have the power to act, to affect matters, to make decisions and choices, and take stances, for example, in relation to their work and professional identities"(Vahasantanen, 2015, 2). Agency is influenced by the "individual and collective experiences, beliefs and practices that individuals accumulate in learning and performing their roles"(Stronach, 2010, 98) or in other words, the ecological nature of practice (Priestly et al., 2015; Stronach, 2010; Kemmis et al., 2014).

Participants' suggestions ranged from improving existing relationships, changing current assessment practices to providing additional opportunities for pupils to acquire improved literacy, numeracy and study skills. Three of the participants differentiated in their response between what they would ideally recommend, if it were possible and what they perceived as possible.

Two teachers focussed on improving existing relationships. Hannah had noticed that her pupils responded well when other members of staff visited the classroom and acknowledged the children's work. Her pupils enjoyed displaying and talking about their work, which she believed deepened their learning. She believed this could be improved by increasing the pool of people who relate with the children in school

which in turn acknowledges the teacher's work, "*It's to place the value on what the teacher is doing with the children'.* Gillian on the other hand, focussed on improving relationships with parents and the wider community by reviewing the current parent/teacher meeting practice and developing strategies to make meaningful connections with parents so *"that there is an ongoing open conversation all year".* She posed possibilities for achieving this in her practice and considered what additional support would be needed from other school staff.

Anna suggested changing the current emphasis on standardised testing to more of a continuous formative nature would improve children's confidence in their learning potential.

> *I'd get rid of a lot of the testing that goes on, especially the standardised testing and stuff like that. Because sometimes children can get disheartened if they feel they are not doing well on that, even get worked up about it, so I'd change that whole approach.*

It is worth noting that while the focus on standardised testing has increased in Ireland since 2011, the children are tested once a year in this school and that formative assessment, balanced with summative assessment are core elements of all the curricular policies of the school. It could be argued that the enormity of testing is perceived more by teachers who are under pressure from DEIS initiatives to raise the scores when it has been found their pupils do not perform as well on standardised tests as their more advantaged peers (Mac Ruairc, 2009). Research findings suggest that the current standardised tests are biased in favour of those with middle class linguistic habitus (Mac Ruairc, 2009, 63). Anna's focus on standardised tests could arguably have been intensified by the renewed emphasis on measuring national standards in literacy and numeracy published in the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011) which stated "effective schools and educational interventions can improve learning outcomes substantially for all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds" (DES, 2011, 10). It has been suggested that less experienced teachers' thinking is more influenced by the discourse inherent in current policy documents (Priestly et al., 2015, 70) which may have increased the significance of standardised testing in this young participant's thinking about practice.

In a somewhat related way, Laura and Eimear suggested that after-school homework classes to improve study skills would be of benefit to the children. "*When you think*

how learning is assessed here. And I think that would be, something after school. If they are not able to get that support at home" (Eimear). At the time of this interview, the after-school programme in Oakwood PS consisted of a variety of music, sport, art, technology and gardening activities which some staff members volunteered to provide. While both participants agreed those activities were valuable and that pupils enjoyed them, their suggestion indicated they placed more value on the qualification and socialisation domains of education (Biesta, 2015). However Eimear felt that her suggestion was dependent on having *"a huge big budget and you were able to offer things like that"*.

Three participants were of the opinion that budget and resource constraints inhibited the level of opportunities that could be offered to pupils. They suggested that smaller class sizes and more teaching personnel were ideally required, but acknowledged those issues were dependent on resource allocation from the DES. Denise considered the various efforts school staff had already made and simply added, *"I wouldn't say anyone within the school can do anymore"*. Laura similarly responded "*I don't know what else we could do"*, indicating a low sense of agency in some participants' perspectives.

Whereas two participants had proposals they felt were feasible and within their capacity to actualise, four participants' responses suggested attitudes which reflected lack of agency in their perceptions regarding their power as teachers to act, to affect matters or make decisions and choices (Vähäsantanen , 2015). The varying perception of agency amongst the participants who were all subject to the same predominant policy directives from the DES and to the implications of those policies at school level suggests that agency is phenomenon dependent on the interplay of both the individual's capacity, skills, knowledge and beliefs and the conditions in which they practice including the cultural, structural and material resources or constraints of those past and present conditions (Priestly et al., 2015). Priestly et al also suggested that agency is not a capacity one has or not, rather it can emerge, develop and shift.

The preceding sections of this chapter give a snapshot of the perspectives of the six colleagues as they spoke about their practice before they engaged in action research with their pupils. Early socialisation of the participants into the school system which

was compatible with and supported by their families initiated a mainly uninterrupted trajectory through the education system to their qualification as teachers. Their recollection of ITE in Ireland suggests that their conceptualisation of the role of teacher was neither disrupted nor augmented during their ITE which they feel left them unprepared for the diverse situations they encountered as they began teaching. The continuation of practices and perspectives developed in their experiential learning was supported by collegiality with senior teachers. Both sections pointed to the influence of cultural capital and habitus on the formation and maintenance of participants' teaching practice views that framed their perception of the different context in which they work. Yet their motivation to improve their practice and the learning opportunities they provided for their pupils was evident in their acceptance of an invitation to explore our practice in this school through action research.

Action Research: Photographs to stimulate Language, Learning and Communication in Education (PLACE)

Following the Pre-Ar interviews, participants engaged in action research with their own class. Building on the findings of Allen (2002) in the USA, in which photographs were used to connect children's lived experience outside of school with their work and relationships in school, I designed PLACE (Photographs to stimulate Language, Learning and Communication in Education) action research project. The title PLACE is used to refer to the classroom action research in which participants engaged and to differentiate it in this thesis from my action research of which PLACE is a constituent part. The aim of PLACE was three-fold; it aimed firstly to facilitate participants to learn more about their pupils' interests, culture and lives. Secondly it offered an opportunity to participants to judge how these interests could be included in the curriculum. Finally there was the possibility that it could provoke questioning of the practice in the school by participants. The focus here is on the participants' response to PLACE. A full rationale and description of PLACE is shared in chapter three of this thesis. The focus in this chapter is on participants' engagement and responses to it, rather than the actual content of the individual projects. A year separates the two cycles of action research in which teachers engaged in PLACE with their classes. The year allowed time for reflection on cycle one which informed learning for cycle two.

Learning from Cycle One for Cycle Two

In Cycle One I struggled with the dual roles of head teacher and researcher. I was eager to know if the project would help both participants to learn more about their pupils' unrecognised knowledge and experience, but worried I would skew the teachers' interpretations if I was actively involved. On reflection, I learned to recognise this worry as indicative of my ethical integrity to hear and respect participants' authentic views, cognisant of my shifting positionality from head teacher to early stage researcher, while simultaneously inhabiting both roles. While I detected from observations that the project was progressing well, I had to wait until the second interview to hear their views. In Cycle Two, one year later, I grew more confident about my role as a researcher and trusted myself to share my initial analysis of the first interviews with participants before they began PLACE. This required a change to the original design and the inclusion of a Participants' Consultation Group (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, 91) as described in Chapter Three. In the Consultation Group participants were all given a document. The document (Appendix 5) was used to structure the feedback to participants and scaffold the subsequent discussion. It outlined the broad initial findings from the first set of interviews, my interpretation of how Bourdieu's theoretical framework of capital, habitus and field was relevant to teacher understanding of the influence of preschool and school experiences on one's perspectives, along with excerpts from the interviews and an overview of action research. The Participants' Consultation Group served three main purposes. From my perspective, it provided a bridge from first-person research to engaging with others in second-person research (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014). It allowed for a transparent articulation of the research rationale to participants based on evidence of participants' shared understandings communicated in the interviews, which underpinned practice in Oakwood PS. Such evidence acts as a stimulus for reflection (Herr and Anderson, 2005). Moreover it emphasised the situational nature of the research as relevant to participants in Oakwood PS.

From the participants' perspective it was the first time since they had accepted the invitation to engage in research that they had the opportunity to hear feedback and discuss it as a group facilitating a more participative aspect of action research. Initially they appeared most interested in the similarities of their childhood experiences and trajectories to teaching careers, followed by the common constraints

they perceived in practice. Those joining for cycle two had the opportunity to discuss the process with the participants who had already engaged in cycle one. The ensuing discussion focussed more on the technical aspects of PLACE, such as time management, camera sharing and photograph storage, rather than questioning the purpose or rationale for the classroom research. Both participants from cycle one shared their perception of their pupils' engagement and enjoyment of the project. Two other participants asked what outcome was required from their classroom projects. When there was no outcome suggested other than the opportunity to learn more about their pupils and use their professional judgement to inform their practice based on those findings, they did raise their concerns that a possible external evaluation would not appreciate the research. This had been anticipated and attention was drawn to the 'Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers' (Teaching Council, 2012) , in which teachers are encouraged to:

> ...inform their professional judgement and practice by engaging with, and reflecting on, pupil/student development, learning theory, pedagogy, curriculum development, ethical practice, educational policy and legislation.
>
> (Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers, 2012, 7)

I was aware that reassuring participants this research aligned with the principles underpinning the 'Code of Professional Conduct' was an attempt to allay fears about external evaluation, and allow them the freedom to reflect on and develop their practice rather than focus on regulatory accountability "which sets up a compliance culture where conformity is valued over diversity at individual level" (Conway et al., 2009, 152). Reflexively I understood my actions as an effort to create a prefigurative environment in which participants could learn in the current conditions to generate new possibilities for practice (Amsler, 2015, 40). Action research does not engender certainty, but provides a medium for exploring practice in the present time with a view to improving future practice (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014).

Reflecting on cycle one I had considered how the teachers had used a diary to keep a log of the project, which was not shared for discussion with me until the follow up interview. As a researcher I felt I lost continuity with participants' ongoing engagement in the research process during cycle one. Following consultation with all participants the hard copy diary was replaced by an online blog for cycle two. A private blog, titled 'Learn Where We Teach' was created, to which participants were

invited to record their reflective entries, throughout the duration of PLACE. The blog facilitated my engagement with the individual participant's reflections in cycle two as entries were posted from January until June 2016, the duration of PLACE in the classrooms. The blog entries differed in style and content, with some teachers giving a recount of their conversations with children and others reflecting on their own reaction to the conversation and experience. It became apparent early in cycle two that while some of the participants were comfortable recording their reflections, one participant was reticent for a number of weeks. In that time she regularly mentioned to me that she had started PLACE, that it was going well, but she had not yet posted to the blog, though she intended to. While on the one hand I sensed she sought to reassure me that she was doing the project, on the other I was aware that reflective diaries are sometimes perceived "as a chore and a fiction" (Stronach, 2010, 121), another requirement of performativity. She was assured there was no one correct way to engage in PLACE, she as the teacher would make the judgements required and could share these in the second interview towards the end of term. While she did post to the blog after five weeks, awareness of her dilemma early in the process deepened my insight of the difficulties associated with changing aspects of practice.

Concurrently the other participants engaged in the blog with three of them sharing their judgements on the most appropriate way to introduce PLACE to their classes. Two described how they modelled the process by showing their own photographs to their classes, explaining to their pupils why they chose to photograph a particular subject and then eliciting children's questions about their photograph. Both were encouraged with the children's interest, questions and enthusiasm to participate and share. Another participant wrote how she chose not to take this option in case it constrained the children's choices. It appeared from the onset of PLACE these participants welcomed the opportunity to record their thinking regarding their professional judgement. While the blog entries facilitated the discussion at the second interview, they also provided a rich source of data of the participants' ongoing responses throughout the action research. The next section reports on the findings garnered from the blog entries and Post-AR interviews in which participants shared their varying reactions and the learning opportunities they perceived engaging in PLACE presented. The subsequent section compares these with the findings from the first interview

Learning more about the children

Participants expressed surprise about the enthusiasm of children to engage in PLACE and share aspects of their lives outside of school with their teachers. Broadly children shared a depth of knowledge which they had not previously shared or had the opportunity to share with their teacher, about local places, hobbies and care of pets including fish, cats, rabbits, horses, hamsters, parrots and dogs. Care and respect for younger and elderly family members also featured in conversations stimulated by children's photographic contributions.

Participants were surprised to learn about aspects of children's lives which they had not known, including personality traits, religious and cultural traditions and family relationships. What surprised Denise and Anna particularly was the children's willingness to bring up topics which the teachers would not normally pry into. The word 'pry' came up in four interviews, as participants were surprised with the openness of children's conversations, bearing in mind that parents had approved these photographs. As Anna said, "*well I personally wouldn't like to go prying into....you know backgrounds"*. Denise perceived a difference when the children chose the topic to discuss rather than the teacher asking about it. She would have considered she *"knew"* her class members individually but on reflection realised that this was the first time she had one to one conversations with some children on a topic of *their* choosing. She learned more about Islam and Traveller culture through conversation with her pupils.

Travellers have been an indigenous minority group within Irish society for over a millennium, making up less than 1% of the total population (CSO, 2016), and finally granted ethnic recognition in March 2017. Over 10% of our school enrolment is comprised of Traveller children. Currently Travellers are fifty times more likely to leave school without having completed second level education compared with non-Travellers (Watson et al., 2017, 31). Whilst various reasons are suggested for this, the negative experiences of Traveller children in school are a likely explanation (Watson et al., 2017, 5). PLACE provided a space for participants to hear and learn from our Traveller children which some participants grasped while two participants remained unaware of how their prior perceptions inhibited this opportunity.

Four participants wrote or spoke about the opportunity PLACE provided for them to learn more about Traveller culture or their assumptions about it. One said she would never have known about the cooking and marriage traditions of the Traveller Culture if she was not involved in PLACE. Conversation with two of her Traveller children challenged the stereotypical representations put forward in the media. Likewise another learned of the importance of religious symbols in the Traveller community through a photograph a child shared. The third participant wrote about how she reflected on her assumptions about Traveller boys when one of her '*big and brash... from the Travelling Community'* , boys brought in a number of photographs from his home but chose to share his photo of Pearls, a Pekingese dog, with her and the class. She was really surprised at his choice and later reflected on why she was surprised. She had expected him to present a tougher image. The fourth participant was intrigued with the aspects of Gammon [also known as Shelta or Cant], the native language of Travellers. She learned that the children use different words at home, particularly with older members of their community and she had not known this. She questioned if this language should be acknowledged in school.

On the other hand two participants responded differently. One did not mention Travellers at all but her judgement of Traveller parenting as deficient became visible in that silence. Three of her pupils brought in photographs related to technology. One spoke about a game she played on a tablet which involved killing exploding creepers. The other two children said they used the technology to 'skype' various relatives. One of these children was from the Traveller Community. When the participant posted on the blog about her conversation with this child, she made no reference to the fact that he had said he also used it for maths games but commented '*I feel that the tablet can be over used and maybe parents need to monitor the time the child uses it for'***.** Whilst it is accepted that all responsible parents should monitor their children's use of technology, there was no indication in her post that his parents neglected this responsibility compared with both other children's parents. This was the one time the participant suggested in her blog entries that parents needed to do more than what they were doing. He was the sole child from the Traveller Community in her class. Another participant did not post about the Traveller girl in her class. I was aware that the girl's mother had returned the Parental Consent Form, as had all other parents of children in that class, suggesting full engagement with PLACE. I was interested in

the child's contribution and asked the participant at the Post-AR interview about the child's engagement. The participant recounted that she had not trusted this girl to return the camera and orchestrated her turn to have the camera on a day she knew this girl would be absent. The child's sibling had engaged in PLACE in another participant's class.

These findings were challenging to read and to hear. They are troubling to report in this thesis as they do not align with the articulated values of Oakwood PS or any other school I'm familiar with. On the other hand they display the contradiction that can exist between articulated values and actions (Larrivee, 2000; McNiff and Whitehead, 2002). Teachers are not immune to the norms and values prevalent in society at large (Devine, 2005, 52); the levels of intolerance or social prejudice to Travellers in Ireland is particularly high (Mac Gréil, 2011; Watson et al., 2017).

Oakwood PS is under the patronage of the Catholic Church and states in its mission statement that "children of all faiths and none" are welcome. 10% of our enrolment is of the Islamic faith. Participating teachers expressed surprise when they learned of the serious study of the Koran some of these children engage with outside of school. When one child was showing a photograph of her favourite toy, it emerged she had received it as a reward for her evening study. She told Gillian about the various books in the Koran. Gillian realised she was unsure how to spell some of the titles but posted in the blog how:

> *A chance meeting with her mother later that day gave me the opportunity to ask her to help me with the spelling of the words [the child] had mentioned. She explained about the number of different books within the Koran and how they progress through them as they study. She was genuinely delighted to share the information and the project in this case provided me with an authentic connection to [child's name] culture, of which I have to admit, I have little depth of knowledge.*

It emerged in other interviews that children chose to share aspects of their religious beliefs and customs when the opportunity arose through PLACE, possibly reflecting a desire "to see themselves in the curriculum"(Lopez, 2014, 465). This is not to suggest that Islamic children focussed solely on their religion; categorising children as Islamic or some others as Travellers is convenient to show the aspects of children's lives which participants learned more about. In a similar way other

findings participants reported can best be communicated if grouped into findings about children who are learning English as an additional language (EAL), those assessed with special educational needs (SEN) or learning difficulties (LD) and those with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD). However children are more than the category to which they are assigned, with some simultaneously positioned in multiple categories and others outside of these groupings. They are individuals who together constitute the pupils of one primary school.

A total of 24% of Oakwood Primary enrolment is made up of EAL pupils. Teachers in general commented that these children used a broader and deeper level of expressive language when they conversed on a topic stimulated by a photograph they contributed. Hannah explained "*when he was talking about the photo his language was slightly freer, like he didn't have to think as hard about what he was saying"*. Anna spoke about an EAL child who also had social and emotional difficulties. The child was animated, coherent and enthusiastic when explaining her hobby to Anna who said:

> *It was interesting because sometimes she gets frustrated if she can't get the words out so...it really gave her confidence, and her language wasn't a barrier at all.*

Regularly teachers were surprised by the articulated confident accounts children with SEN or LD gave on a topic of their choice supported by their photograph. One Infant child, about whom Hannah was particularly concerned, spoke about her dog, his name, size, colour, likes, dislikes. She elaborated, unprompted, to tell the teacher about his food, the best place to buy it, visits to the vet and the dog's equipment using a range of vocabulary. She was able to include other family members into her description stating their role in the dog's care. Whilst still concerned about this child's lack of progress in other areas, Hannah recognised as strengths the child's oral ability and thinking skills when the subject was relevant to her. Eimear spoke of her surprise, possibly reflecting her lower expectations (Swann et al., 2012), when a child with SEN insisted on redrafting her written account of her photographic subject until she was satisfied with it. Eimear recounted that this child had previously not shown interest in the presentation or accuracy of her work.

On April 26th Gillian posted about an *"ah ha moment"* she'd had the previous week, when a boy whose behaviour she described as challenging had a conversation with

her about his photograph.*"His stories were interesting, very personal and important to him"*. She then described the rest of the day as *"amazing"* when he remained happy, relaxed and cooperative for the entire day. She *"chatted"* with him the following morning and noticed the same effect. At the time of posting she concluded with:

> *I have had good and some difficult days with him since and on the surface of it, it seems to correlate roughly with whether or not I get him on his own to chat in the mornings. Plenty of food for thought.*

Other participants spoke of seeing a side of a child's personality which changed their view of the child. When a boy brought in a photograph of his shed, which he had painted, tidied and locked, [having purchased the lock himself], the teacher found it ironic as he had not shown similar pride in caring for his school equipment. His interests combined with other children's, stimulated a project in which the whole class later fundraised, purchased and painted additional outdoor benches for use at break-times as a gift to all children in the school. Children told their teachers about aspects of their lives about which participants had been unaware, sometimes humorous accounts; other times revealing children's responsibilities that participants had previously not fully comprehended. On occasion participants found the children's contributions disturbing.

Dilemmas Teachers Encountered

Whilst the photographs were generally considered helpful, there were occasions when teachers were concerned with the content of the photo rather than the conversation with the child. When a child showed a photograph of his baby sister, the teacher was concerned as the baby did not look well cared for. She brought her concerns to my attention [as per Child Protection Guidelines] rather than posting on the blog about them. The family had many difficulties as the father had a history of drug related offences, the mother had been unwell and there were nine children in total. Social Services were already involved. The child in her class spoke fondly of his sister and showed pride in his ability to help his mother care for her.

A similar incident occurred in another class in which a photograph of a cat showed evidence of the living conditions of the family sitting room in the background. In conversation with the teacher the child spoke animatedly about his cat. She was

concerned for a number of reasons which she did not specify but she did not want the other children to see it as he might be teased. Eventually she decided to crop the photograph so that only the cat, as the subject of the photograph was visible. The teacher posted that *"a photograph gave me an insight into what home life might be like for some children, and made me a little uncomfortable to say the least* ". Learning to see the world through the eyes of the child had ethical implications as "the camera intrudes and reveals" (Harper, 1998, 25) by revealing more than the subject of the photograph. It upset participating teachers to see situations they felt were not appropriate for children. It appears that in these exchanges the children did not perceive their photographs as revelatory; they wanted to share aspects of their lives with their teachers.

On the other hand participants' knowledge of certain children's situations posed dilemmas about their inclusion in PLACE. One teacher was reluctant to give the camera to a child who was in emergency accommodation as his family was homeless. She felt it would put pressure on him, when there was already upheaval in his life. After thinking about the situation she decided it would be *"unfair"* to deprive him of the opportunity to decide whether or not to engage. The child returned with a photograph of himself, dressed in his school uniform and waiting for the bus that morning. They proceeded have an interesting conversation about his route to school, his opinions on the bus and his thoughts about the positives and negatives of wearing a school uniform.

The preceding account of dilemmas three participants encountered demonstrates their varying levels of agency. In the first case the participant was motivated to seek support for a family, while in the second the participant's discomfort motivated her to remove the jarring aspects of the photograph. She did this for the child's acceptance among his peers, while indicting her discomfort with what she had observed. The third participant considered the dilemma from the child's perspective and gave him autonomy to choose how to engage in the project. The three dilemmas are not comparable but do give an indication of the professional judgements made by participants as they recognised the reality of children's lived experiences through the action of PLACE.

Teachers' Evaluation of their Engagement in PLACE

Overall the participants evaluated PLACE as a positive experience. From their perspective they had all enjoyed the enthusiasm and motivation of their pupils' engagement. Their positive evaluation was evidenced in their own enthusiasm to engage in PLACE with their next class the following year. The specific benefits they perceived are outlined in this section which concern relationships, knowledge of their pupils and teacher practice. These benefits were counterbalanced by the tension some experienced in their teaching role. Contradictions also emerged as some participants reflected on engagement in PLACE.

All participants said they would like to adopt PLACE as part of their classroom practice the following year, with modifications to suit different purposes. One suggested the photographs could be used as a stimulus for children writing about their interests and the creation of a classroom book. Another suggested the interests children indicated would inform her choice of reading material from which children could select and another suggested a theme of actual places for the following year which would inform local studies from a SESE perspective. All of the participants indicated that they had learned more about the individual children in their class with most of them suggesting that the beginning of the school year was a more appropriate time to commence PLACE to facilitate this learning as early as possible. One participant who began by extolling the benefits of PLACE for its facilitative benefits for gaining knowledge of her individual pupils suggested the second term of the year as the ideal time to commence PLACE rather than the beginning of the year "*when you are trying to get to know your class"*, which appears to contradict her previous evaluation. Another participant spoke of the benefits of pupils' enthusiasm about PLACE but suggested she had not learned anything she had not known previously. This appeared to contradict the blog entries she had posted in which she wrote about children's sense of responsibility in the home and the artistic talents of some of the children's parents, which she had not been aware of and which had subsequently supported classroom activities. In later cycles of analysis, it was noted that both participants who expressed contradictory evaluations were the same two participants who had viewed Travellers as untrustworthy or irresponsible when there was little evidence of those attributes in the classroom events they referenced. In

contrast the other participants raised questions about practice in the school and prior assumptions they held as they reflected on their experience of PLACE.

Participants had assumed that some children would be reluctant to engage in PLACE and that the voluntary nature of participation would facilitate their abstention. That assumption was challenged as children willingly participated. In the process five participants perceived that their relationship with their pupils improved through shared knowledge and conversation. Eimear said that she felt the children responded well when she asked specifically at a later stage about something they had shared with her, even if it was as simple as remembering a pet's name. Denise wondered if it was her imagination but felt the children were more open to talking with her after the one to one conversation. She differentiated between those children who always shared their thoughts readily and those who had previously been more restrained. She noticed the most change with the latter group. Anna was more definite that her relationship with children had improved but also thought that the process had freed her from her fear of prying as she found that the children were eager to share. Moreover, children's relationships with each other were perceived to have improved in classes where the photographs were shared with others in presentations on children's interests or in other whole class activities. Anna had worried that some boys would not be interested in a girl's presentation on 'Irish Dancing', however she discovered "*but they were, because she was in their class"*. Hannah, Eimear and Denise also noticed that children were attentive to each other's interests which in turn stimulated questions, conversations and connections to other topics.

Perceptions of teacher parent relationships improved in some cases. Sometimes it was when teachers sought information from parents who all responded positively. In some cases parents added to the information scripted about the photograph and gave teachers an insight into their interest in their child. Three teachers expressed surprise at the parents who engaged in this manner, as Denise said about a mother:

> *She has very poor literacy skills and is lacking in confidence, well she wrote a lovely passage about how what her daughter had said about the grandparents photograph being so true.*

In one case a mother who did not engage with school previously, though six of her children were past pupils or in senior classes, helped her son to add more information to his photograph of his parrot. As Gillian said:

> *I don't meet her before or after school, she doesn't come to parent/teacher meetings, I don't have a contact number for her [this mother regularly changed her mobile number and did not respond to correspondence from school] so I have never spoken to her throughout the year. It was quite interesting that she had helped him. Knowing his writing, the help she gave him took quite a while..... I was amazed at that.*

Other participants expressed an appreciation of parents which they had gleaned through conversations with the child rather than through the photographs. In one case a child brought in a photograph of her mother. The participant later wrote:

"This photo has reminded me (again!) to be aware of the danger of making assumptions". The assumptions to which she referred were based on her knowledge of the parent who was a past pupil. This mother had lost a sibling through tragedy when she was a child, been orphaned following sudden death of her mother and her father's subsequent suicide, had lived with a sister who struggled with drug addiction, been homeless for periods and became a single parent at eighteen years of age. Following the conversation in which the child told about the activities she and her mother did together the participant wrote of her realisation of the love and sense of security that mother had succeeded in creating in her daughter's life, despite the barriers she had encountered.

Relationships emerged in the reflective writing in one participant's blog postings. A succession of her pupils had brought photographs of toys or possessions they valued. While initially she worried the photographs could potentially become a materialistic exhibition, she realised that the conversations stimulated by these photographs related to the story associated with the possession. As she said later in the Post-Ar interview, "*and even if it was a picture of a toy or a gift, it was because of the link being made to the person who gave it to them or where they were when they got it"*. In most cases the possession was important to the child because it was given to them by a particular person or reminded them of an event or feeling. It appeared that as participants engaged with children in conversations about children's selected subjects they began to view the child's world through a shared perspective with the child. Some participants began to view their pupils' lives through a more enriched lens compared with the deficit lens of their assumptions prior to PLACE.

Participants spoke about the interesting subjects children chose to share with them and the range of knowledge children displayed naturally in the conversations. In one case a child's description of decorating a room with her aunt initiated Anna's reflection on the curriculum as she understood it. The child had named the specific colours they had used which included the colour turquoise. Anna contrasted the colour in the child's real world with the spelling list which was presented to her in school which included the word blue. Anna questioned how a child could be content with blue when turquoise was in her repertoire. Reflecting on similar occasions when children surprised her she suggested, "*we don't give them enough credit for the language they have ..... we don't give enough opportunities for them to use their language".* She thought what was required was a change in teachers' mindsets of fixation with getting the curriculum covered.

Denise was similarly surprised with a photograph of the view from a child's bedroom window. She had not realised that homes in a local housing estate had views of the river flowing into the harbour with the local mountains clearly visible. She described it as beautiful and that it presented lots of opportunities which she could incorporate in her yearly plan for her class. It was as if she was seeing the locality through her pupil's perspective while the view from the child's window remained unchanged but shared. Regularly participants expressed surprise at what they had learned with comments such as "*I never realised before"* and "*I didn't know that...."* expressed in discussions in the Post-AR interview. Their enhanced perspectives stimulated their thinking about possibilities for school connections with children's localities and it did appear as if they were beginning to experience the space between the curriculum-as-planned and the curriculum-as-lived (Aoki, 1993) in a more responsive relationship with their pupils

Teacher Practice and PLACE

All six participants were asked if they had experienced difficulty incorporating PLACE into their normal practice. One participant said she had felt rushed whereas the others reported that it had merged well and became an aspect for which they planned. Denise did say she had anticipated difficulties before she started which did not materialise. In particular she had thought her pupils would not be interested in sharing their interests and that PLACE would be difficult to manage in the limited time available in the school day. Shared initial concerns among the participants about

not knowing in advance how they would use the photographs also dissipated as the projects progressed. They found that they could link the photographs to learning objectives in the curriculum, especially in areas like writing, reading, poetry, music and art. Their planning was in response to children's contributions rather than planned to meet curriculum objectives. Two participants said it informed their differentiation decisions whereas two others were pleased with the creativity it allowed children to demonstrate. It was noted that the classroom projects which emerged from PLACE kept two senior classes absorbed until the end of the year, with a perception of a reduction in behavioural issues in one class group who had a reputation for such issues.

That being said participants did encounter difficulties engaging with the project. As one said: *"you nearly felt you weren't being a teacher.....Is this work or is it a conversation? What is it? How do you put it down on paper as objectives?"* When I wondered was she putting it down on paper to guide herself or to show someone else, she simply replied: "*Inspectors"*. She thought that maybe they would approve if she explained the benefits she had discovered but added, *"Sometimes teachers don't have the confidence to say that"*.

Another participant said that she had felt rather frustrated during PLACE as:

> *The teacher part of me wanted to spend more time on the literacy part of it, on the writing part of it and to bring that forward, whereas when you are just needed to concentrate on the connections.... just getting to know the children and not worry too much about the quality of the language.*

During the Post-AR interview, four weeks after the second cycle of PLACE finished, she still experienced conflicted feelings about this issue, while also believing that her knowledge and understanding of her pupils was enhanced.

Acquiring the time to converse with individual children featured as an anticipated difficulty, which was overcome. In three cases the teacher set up independent work activities for the rest of the children to continue on with, whilst two teachers organised Support Teachers to work with the remainder of the class so that they could concentrate on their one to one conversations with individual children.

The benefits and constraints most participants perceived with PLACE show evidence of them engaging with dilemmas in which their professional judgement was required. They made decisions which were closely related to their interpretations of the children's interests which showed elements of teacher agency rather than compliance with prescribed strategies. The lack of prescription posed initial uncertainty for participants. Engaging in the process facilitated their sense of agency as they responded to their pupils' contributions.

Comparison of Teacher Perceptions Expressed in Both Interviews

Initial comparison of the views expressed in the first interview with those in the second one indicates a changing attitude in perceptions to their role as teachers in Oakwood PS. In the first interview these teachers all recounted aspects of their childhoods, which through a Bourdieuian perspective demonstrated that they had acquired the cultural capital necessary to succeed in the Irish educational system. Evidence of their habitus as defined by Bourdieu, which operates below the level of calculation and consciousness, and provides individuals with a sense of how to act and respond in the course of their daily life (Mills and Gale, 2007), appeared to inform their judgements of children's and parents' behaviour. Regularly when discussing their role as teachers they referred to their own schooling and parental support, reflecting how their autobiographical lens had a major influence on how and what teachers teach (Stigler and Hiebert, 1999). Five of the teachers appeared to be trapped in 'circles of certainty' (Freire, 1972, 5), which prevented them from seeing the strengths, richness and dilemmas of children's school and contextual experience. It would appear that the nature of their ITE in Ireland and the ubiquitous respect for the views and practice of more experienced teachers contributed to the uncritical (O'Sullivan, 2005) persistence of their deficit views of children and parents.

While the cultural nature of teaching deserves attention, it needs to be juxtaposed with the space in which teachers currently find themselves, conflicted between the opposing forces of standardisation and performance versus the holistic growth of children's identities, capacities and relationships. In was evident in data from the first interviews that teachers all felt pressurised to raise literacy and numeracy standards and were following the good practice guidelines recommended at recent Professional Development courses. Frustration with certain children's lack of interest was evident,

but as in Devine's (2013) findings, they were determined to give the children the best chance possible.

In comparison in the Post-AR interviews participants all spoke more positively about their pupils' abilities and particularly about the children's interesting characteristics and interests. There was a more appreciative tone to discussions of parental practice. Improved relationships, classroom behaviour and motivation were noted by some. There was recognition by four teachers that assumptions they had previously held were erroneous. All teachers reported enjoying the project and while they gave a variety of other reasons, each of them enjoyed the children's enthusiastic response, reflecting that teachers can cope with negative experiences and change "provided that positive episodes—such as strong relationships with students—are constantly experienced" (Morgan et al., 2010, 204). It appears that engagement in PLACE acted as a catalyst to create the conditions in which some participants experienced those positive relationships and began to disrupt their habitual ways of thinking. PLACE as the core action research cycle achieved its three-fold aims as it facilitated participants to learn more about their pupils' interest, culture and lives. Secondly they considered how to include children's contributions in the curriculum and finally it allowed participants the opportunity and space to question the way things are done or taken for granted, in Oakwood PS. The preceding descriptive report on the findings of the core cycles of action research with participants are broadly summarised Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Summary of Findings of Participants' Engagement in PLACE

Prior to Action Research	Following Action Research
Unexamined Assumptions	**Recognition of Assumptions**
Children's lack of motivation to learn from teacher	Children's motivation to engage in learning with teacher
Lack of parental interest in children's education	Recognition of parental interest and engagement
Adequate Teacher knowledge of school community	Realisation of the limits of prior community knowledge
Social prejudice about other cultures/groups	Recognition of knowledge and customs of other groups
Prior Perceptions	**Changed Perceptions**
Teacher focus on deficits of context, pupils and parents through perspectives informed by habitus	Recognition of strengths, attributes and diversity of context, pupils and parents informed through engagement
Constrained practice	Enabled to practice
Under pressure to cover curriculum	Enjoyed responsive curriculum
Lack of teaching time	Engaged in learning time
Lack of teacher agency	Evidence of teacher agency and judgements
Prior Actions	**Changed Actions**
Compliant with Good Practice Guidelines	Practice more aware and responsive to children's interests
Detailed planning in advance	Combination of advance and responsive planning

Conclusion

This chapter detailed the descriptive findings of second-person action research with six colleagues in Oakwood PS. It outlined participants' perspectives before, during and after engagement in the core cycles of action research. While it is suggestive that action research can contribute to changing perspectives about teaching practice, deeper analysis of these findings are reported in the next chapter. The process of analysis raised questions I had not anticipated about the culture of teaching in Ireland relevant to practice in disadvantaged contexts.

Chapter 5: Analysis of Action Research

Introduction

Analysis in action research is not only a retrospective process but a sense-making practice that shapes the story as it evolves (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, 17). This chapter reports on how my understanding developed as I framed, constructed, conducted and evaluated action research with colleagues in Oakwood PS in exploration of the taken-for-granted aspects of our practice. It examines both the process of analysing data from and about participant engagement in PLACE as well as the process of deepening reflexivity that emerged in the practice of analysis. It distinguishes analysis of data generated with others through action research from the parallel analysis of reflexive engagement in self study.

It illustrates how this research facilitated movement from a concern with taken for granted practice in Oakwood PS, to an awareness of the implications of the neoliberal managerialism in current DES policy on practice, to a gradual comprehension of the relation of surface teaching practice to the deep structure of historical, cultural, political, ideological and value issues in the Irish context (Grace 1995; Ball 2006; Bourdieu 1990) in which my perspectives were formed. It demonstrates that action research is an approach that can accommodate one's transition from a practice orientation to an understanding about one's practice and a self awareness of how deep cultural structures had informed and embedded in my perspectives.

Chapter one framed the research as it outlined the personal and professional view I held of the context from which this research journey began. In it I explained how using the theoretical framework provided by Pierre Bourdieu helped me to understand my limited perspective on my own position in the education system and began a reflexive engagement with my personal understanding of practice in Oakwood PS. It enabled a different perception of the difficulties experienced by children and teachers in Oakwood PS and underpinned the construction of the design of second person research outlined in chapter three. I made my thinking explicit to explicate to the reader the ongoing analysis of my understandings that shaped decisions in the construction. Chapter four presented the story in which colleagues

engaged with me in talking about their practice before and after engaging in PLACE with their pupils. It tells the story as comprehensively and transparently as possible, augmented by contextual explanation to assist the reader, but does not include interpretation. The intention in writing the chapter was to present the full account to facilitate others' evaluation of the validity of the process (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014, 169). While participants' voices featured in the quotations presented in the findings, the story was written from my construction conceptualised at an earlier phase in self-study. Self-study continued in parallel to the second-person research with colleagues as illustrated in Diagram 3.1.

This chapter is arranged in three sections. The first section analyses data generated in second-person inquiry. It is followed by an analysis of the ongoing self-study and the gaps in my understanding that second-person research raised. The final section merges first-person and second-person inquiry through the ethical lens of relational reflexivity.

Analysis of Second-Person Research with Participating Teachers in Oakwood PS

It is essential to reiterate that data generated with participants evolved from analysis of my understanding of my position in the education system expanded through my reflexive engagement with the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu. At the design stage I was becoming aware of the limited perspective I held and the transforming effect of thinking differently. The design intended that participants would get a similar opportunity to explore the taken-for-granted truisms of teaching practice in Oakwood PS through the medium of classroom action research projects (PLACE). Data was generated with the ethical commitment of respect for others' voice, perspectives and emotional well being.

Analysis of data generated in the research evolved throughout the two cycles of action and reflection from January 2015 to June 2016, which aligned with the emergent nature of action research from self-study. Data referred to in this section consisted of transcripts from Pre-AR interviews, participant diary and blog entries and Post-AR interviews which correspond with the order in which they were generated. Initial analysis was conducted through the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu in which I sought mainly to ascertain if the primary habitus of the teacher

enables or constrains their perceptions and practice in Oakwood PS. Secondly I sought to discover if action research practice based on children's knowledge and interests could alter and contribute to expanding those perceptions in order to enable alignment with the principles of the Primary Curriculum (1999). The process of analysis was informed by qualitative methods but was more recursive than linear. It prioritised respect for the voice and contributions of participants. The process which involved coding data, organising and comparing codes, pattern identification and finally the emergence of the two themes of continuity and certainty is detailed next. It also signposts that this process raised questions which data did not answer. The need to explore emergent literature (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, 170) arose, which is pertinent to the next section of this chapter.

Beginning the Process of Second-Person Analysis

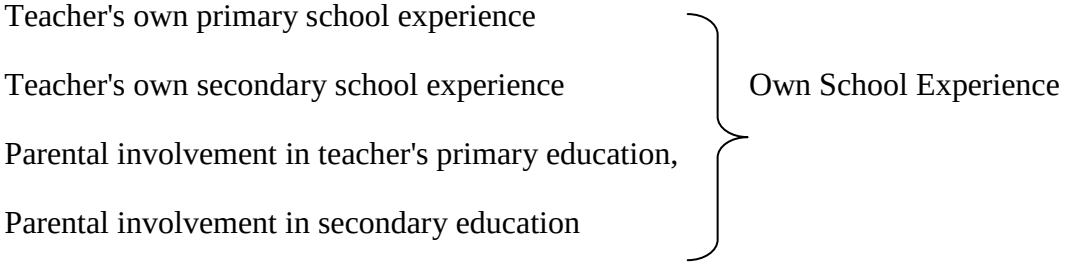
After each interview, recordings were listened to on the same day to ensure the conversation was audible and relive the mood of the conversation. Each was transcribed verbatim. I read the transcripts several times and underlined salient words and phrases, while simultaneously listening to the intonation and rhythm of the conversation on audio. Rather than cutting them into sections I listened to entire responses to capture the holistic nature of the conversation constructed between us while cognisant that construction was shaped by the questions I had asked (Hammersley, 2017, 180). Descriptive observations and comments were written directly on the transcript margins and constituted my initial interpretation of the jointly constructed dialogues.

The transcripts were then coded. Codes in qualitative research are defined as:

> ...essence capturing and essential elements in the research story that when clustered together according to similarity and regularity (a pattern), actively facilitate the development of categories and thus analysis of their connections.
>
> (Saldana, 2016, 9)

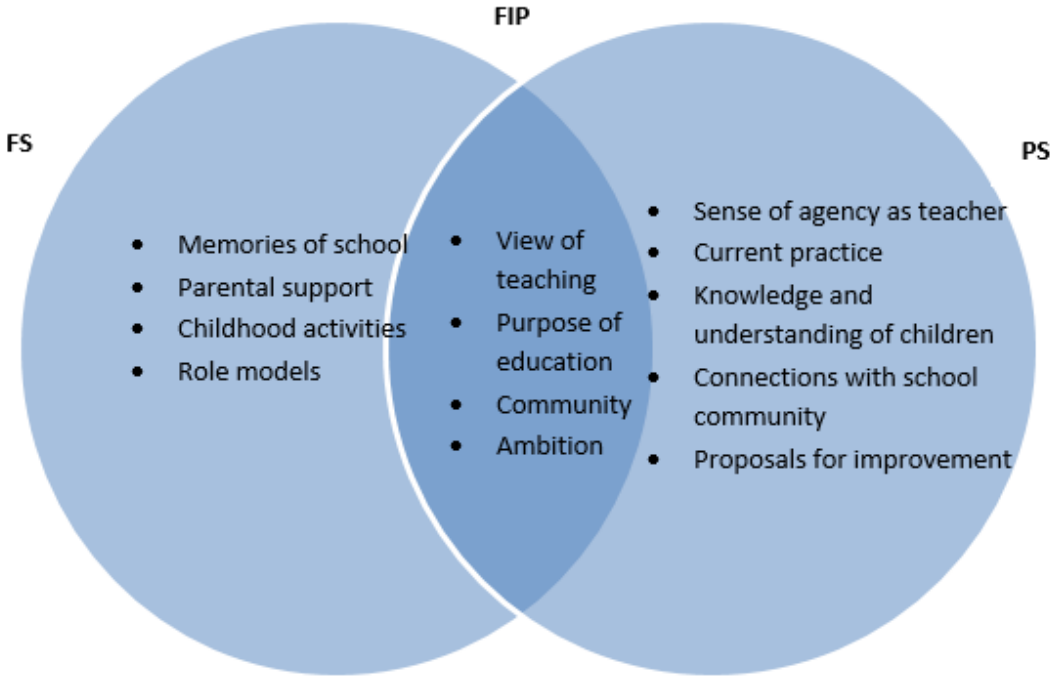
Coding is also a process of "disassembling and reassembling the data ... to produce a new understanding that explores similarities and differences" (Cohen et al. 2011, 599). Using both approaches to coding facilitated the reduction of responses to the topics of the conversations and the elaboration of the analysis of the interview encounter.

First the transcripts were coded using the In Vivo coding method to capture the words and phrases participants used in the conversation, which honoured the participants' voice and aligned with the action research approach (Saldana, 2016, 106). A two column table in Microsoft Word displayed the In Vivo codes alongside the topic under discussion. Topics were then merged, as indicated by consistency in the codes associated with them for example:



A second table of three columns was developed to reflect the merged topics. The first was labelled Topic, the second contained In Vivo text and the third contained the first round of my interpretative codes. A fourth column was added to display whether responses were tentative or definite. (Appendix 6), which informed emotion coding later in the analysis. This process was repeated for each Pre-AR transcript. Using a separate post-it for each code, I arranged and rearranged them finding they could be categorised as referring to two stages of the teacher's life. The first stage related to life prior to beginning a teaching career, which I labelled the formative stage (FS). The second stage corresponded to the teaching phase which was labelled the practicing stage (PS). Some codes appeared in both stages and were positioned to represent this in a stage labelled Formative intersecting Practice (FIP). Diagram 5.1 illustrates that the codes indicated that participants' perspectives on teaching, purpose of education, community and ambition developed in their formative years appeared to be firmly reflected in their current views as practitioners.

Diagram 5.1: Stages of Formation: First Round of Coding



Affective Coding

These initial codes were then expanded deductively as I searched for evidence of the dispositions, actions and perspectives that literature and my own experience suggested were related to habitus. In order to understand how participants 'felt' about their life experiences I coded inductively for affective qualities. "Affective qualities are core motives for human action, reaction and interaction" (Saldana, 2016, 124), inclusive of, yet more than basic emotions such as happiness, sadness or anger. Building on Bourdieu's concept of habitus, Wetherell (2012) incorporates those basic emotions within the concept of 'affective practice' to capture the notion that human emotion or "embodied meaning making" (Wetherell, 2012, 4) is embedded in everyday routines. Saldana posits that since emotions are a universal human experience, acknowledgement of them in our research provides deep insight into the participants' perspectives, worldviews and life conditions (Saldana, 2016, 125), at that specific time in history (Wetherell, 2012, 103). Emotional responses indicate or are interwoven "with value, attitude and belief systems" (Saldana, 2016, 128), therefore these qualities were coded for concurrently. This type of coding required confidence in my own ability to interpret and distinguish participants' emotions, values, attitudes and beliefs from my own, not only in their words but also in inferences from the recorded interviews. In the first two Pre-AR transcripts, the

emotions inherent in the memories of school were dissimilar with one participant recalling happy, engaged, contented feelings and the other describing a stage in life when she felt unhappy and hurt by unfair judgements. When the transcripts of the other four participants were included a year later, data suggested that positive experiences and emotions in formative years in school and home life influenced most participants' motivation to choose teaching as a career.

It is advised to "give a code a name that is closest to the concept it is describing" (Miles and Huberman, 1994, 64), and to define it so that it can be applied consistently over the course of the project, mindful that codes may evolve and change as the research proceeds (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). A Definition List was compiled during the first cycle of second-person research (Appendix 7) organised around the three teacher-life stages. As the research progressed through the second cycle the list was augmented with emerging codes and was expanded to include codes generated in the Action Research Phase (ARP) and the Post Action Research (PAR) stage.

Comparative Coding

Consonant with the nature of action research, additional data was generated as the process evolved, which were coded similarly and necessitated cyclical reviews of previously coded data in light of incoming data. Initially it consisted of the transcripts and excerpts from the reflective diaries of the two first participants. This facilitated comparison of participant's perspectives before and after engaging in PLACE. In the repeat cycle with four additional participants a year later a similar before and after comparison was conducted, augmented by the continuity of data provided through blog postings. Data generated with each participant were compared, and in each case I looked for differences and similarities between Pre-AR and Post-AR data. I wrote memos to identify and track my observations. The memos were also coded to reflect my interpretation of changed perspectives, which sometimes the participants had also acknowledged. For instance regularly throughout the Post-AR data, participants had used the phrases, "I never realised" or "I didn't know" or sometimes "it gave me an insight into" which I coded initially as Action Research (AR) Learning. AR Learning referred to what the participants said they gained from PLACE. Later this code was split as I noticed the learning sometimes referred to participants' insights about themselves and their assumptions

and at other times it had emerged in their PLACE conversations and was about the children, their parents or the locality. The same process of memoing was followed to identify changes in attitudes and emotions.

The next step involved comparing the codes from all the memo, interview and diary/blog sources to search for patterns defined as "repetitive, regular, or consistent occurrences of action or data that appear more than twice" (Saldana, 2016, 5). Commonalities in data can "reflect the underlying meaning of and the relationship among codes" (Gall et al., 2014, 282). The prominent pattern of enjoyment which emerged in all participants Post-AR transcripts regarding their engagement in PLACE provoked deepened analysis. While initially I was relieved that the task I had designed based on research elsewhere (Allen, 2002) generated a satisfying experience for participants and through their accounts, for the pupils also, the pattern seemed conspicuously obvious. I explored the possibility that participants may have presented a more complimentary account as the head teacher was the researcher and also the designer of PLACE (Herr and Anderson, 2005; Cohen et al., 2011, 359). However the consistency of the blog entries in most cases and my observations of the eagerness of participants to share their thoughts about PLACE dispelled those doubts somewhat. References to their engagement in PLACE recorded in their normal monthly progress reports corroborated the research data. It appeared as if participants had enjoyed learning more about their pupils' lives through engagement with content and conversation stimulated by the children's contributions, which in turn had contributed to more interactional teaching approaches.

Thinking about the pattern of enjoyment drew my attention to the absence of similar subjective qualities in some of the Pre-AR discussions of practice. A review of the Pre-AR interviews for participants' emotional response to their everyday practice confirmed the absence of their explicit personal emotional responses to practice in four interviews. Whereas they had spoken more favourably about children than the children's parents, displaying their positive dispositions towards the children in general, but noticeably not about their practice with children. In Vivo codes such as "confined by", "time and pressure", "but I can't because" reflected their perceptions of practice as pressurised and constrained rather than engaged and enjoyable. Their collegial emotional sustenance which had featured throughout the Pre-AR data had masked the distinction between sources of emotional support prior to comparison

with Post-AR data. Moreover I noticed that when discussions of issues they considered difficult arose four participants shifted from active to passive voice using phrases such as "it was challenging". Such a shift could represent a distancing of participants from the issues (Rubin and Rubin , 2005, 210) or possibly the confusion participants' felt when their practice did not have the effect they desired based on their habitus, which five Pre-AR interviews indicated had generated a positive attitude towards teaching practice.

Emergent Themes

Using the concept of habitus to think about the emerging pattern in data, it appeared as if participants' embodied way of being developed through high value on education in their childhood homes, positive parental involvement in their schooling and highly influential role models had imprinted on their beliefs and values as teachers. Building on the concept of habitus it is suggested that the way we feel is embedded in practical consciousness and usual streams of activity (Wetherell, 2012, 104). Their role as teachers suggested they were engaged in the same practical consciousness and types of activity established early in life which Archer (2003) suggests "welcomes you into the confines" (Archer, 2003, 190) of a way of thinking and being. The participants' beliefs and values about education had remained continuous since childhood. Throughout the data, certainty about the role of parents remained consistent with the role five participants' own parents had played. Certainty and continuity emerged as two prominent themes in the coded data. Through the lens of the two themes of certainty and continuity data suggested that values, attitudes and assumptions related to childhood, learning, teaching, community, school and purpose established in the formative stage underpinned thinking in the practicing stage. The context of Oakwood PS which they perceived as different from their formative context had not affected their beliefs and values, but had had an emotional cost. The joy of teaching appeared to have been missing, although the commitment to teach was strong and mainly articulated through references to their own childhood experiences.

While the analysis appeared to confirm that habitus developed in childhood influenced aspects of five teachers' subjective understanding of practice in Oakwood PS, with which I could identify, there was much it did not explain. First, I had expected a generational difference of some sort, especially in Anna's case, as she was

twenty eight years younger than me. Yet the stories she and four others told about their parents' attitudes to teachers, school, homework and employment indicated a broader continuity. Secondly the career choice of the only exceptional participant who had unhappy memories of school did not fit the pattern, although she shared some of her colleagues' attitudes towards practice. Finally their consistent reports of enjoyment of PLACE after which there was a shift in attitudes about pupils' parents and pupils' capacities seemed to indicate that attitudes could alter through changes in actions. PLACE had stimulated the development of intersubjective teaching and learning relationships. Taking the generational, exceptional and intersubjective potential presented by the analysis suggested that concentration on individual habitus was insufficient if an understanding of practice was required. The collective nature of practice emerged as more significant than the individual understanding I had developed initially by using Bourdieu's theories to understand my limited perspective of the education system. A different starting perspective would possibly have focussed attention more on the collective nature of practice identified in "the habitus, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices" (Bourdieu, 1990, 54). Whilst I had initially taken history to refer to the history of one's own habitus, it became evident that a broader interpretation was required to understand collective habitus. Making sense of the second-person inquiry with colleagues prompted a historical review of teaching practices in Ireland, which further enriched my self-study and is the subject of the next section of this chapter.

Analysis of Reflective Cycle through Reflexive Engagement and Understanding

Transition from personal interpretation to collective temporal understanding

To understand individual and collective habitus, inquiry needed to focus on the interrelationship of the past and present social conditions which influenced dispositions, created mutual intelligible practices and contributed to common-sense understandings. Bourdieu recognised the difficulty this presented because past conditions become forgotten, as people engage with current situations while acquired dispositions remain active in present practice (Bourdieu, 1990, 54-58). He differentiated between recent history still within conscious awareness and the conditioning influences of embodied history which becomes internalised as "second nature and so forgotten as history" (Bourdieu, 1990, 56). This raised the question of

what was forgotten in the makeup of my habitus, which influenced my perspectives of professional practice.

The literature review in chapter two is the fruit of research which endeavoured to discover what had contributed to my embodied understanding of my positionality as a pupil, student, teacher and head teacher. Whereas initial engagement with habitus had highlighted the primary influences of my family, the historical review revealed that my family and similar families were beneficiaries of interwoven economic and educational policies in cultural and social conditions about which I had vague awareness. While each policy and condition deserves individual scrutiny, it is the interrelated effect that is most relevant to a discussion of individual and collective habitus. The complexity of interrelatedness demonstrated that an understanding of primary school teachers' practice could not be gained without consideration of the Church/ State nexus nor could 'disadvantaged education' be understood without full appreciation of the human capital emphasis in Irish education which predated and prefigured more recent neoliberal ideology.

The literature review outlines what was learned and in some instances revised and reinterpreted from history. This section relates to self-study analysis of that learning process which reflexively can be understood as transitioning through a threshold concept as the legacy of the past was revealed in my understanding of current primary school teaching practice.

> A threshold concept can be considered as akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something. It represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress
>
> (Meyer and Land, 2006, 3)

Navigating the threshold concept and learning to perceive the taken-for-granted undercurrents of the culture to which I belong was difficult, recursive and prolonged, revealing how my ontological stance was infused with that culture and intertwined with how I learned and felt. It was as Boler (1999 ; 2004) describes, a pedagogy of discomfort in which I recognised that the repression of deeply embedded emotional doubts about aspects of my practice in Oakwood PS, had enabled "unconscious complicity with hegemony" (Boler, 2004, 121).

Whereas ontology is concerned with being, how one sees the world and in relation to others in the world (Sullivan et al., 2016, 31), Archer defines an ontological stance as the basic personal orientation one has towards that world or society. It is the generative mechanism one uses to achieve one's aims (Archer 2003, 343) if one is considered active in their own life. "Everyone is a reflexive being" (Archer, 2003, 167) in which we engage in internal conversations towards ourselves, our society and the relations between them. For Archer our internal conversations are influenced more by our subjective assessment of the ease or difficulty entailed in achieving our aim, meaning she places more emphasis on the generative capacity of reflexivity than on structural enablement or constraint, though she does concede that this personal reflexive conversation is always secondary to society's conversation (Archer, 2003, 13)

Recognition of Prior Reflexivity

Reading the history of Irish education as it related to my subjective understanding through the lens of habitus clarified my evolving stance. I realized that my prior subjective understanding had merged with the social ontology (Schatzki, 2003) or society's conversation inherent in schooling and compatible with my habitus. The historical review which outlined the maintenance of this social ontology through the "meritocratic and consensualist" (Drudy, 1991, 107) attitudes forged through the State/Church nexus explained my subjective understanding of my temporal position within the education system. My "interpretation of what it was to be a good person was constructed within a catholic habitus" (Inglis, 1998, 252), that had little to do with Christian theology or practice. I had achieved my aim of becoming a teacher and remained reluctant to be critical of societal structures and forces I did not understand. I had not learned to question, I had learned to comply, work diligently and treat others well. Moreover I had learned what was permissible to say. If one's thoughts differed from those of authority, one stayed relatively quiet, but could do what one thought was best, which Archer suggests is reflective of an evasive or strategic action which protects one's reflexive conversation, which in turn is emotionally sustaining. It accommodated my position within the "culture of silence" of primary school teachers (Irwin, 2015; Norman, 2003), a culture which I did not fully perceive yet with which my thinking and actions were aligned or confluent. As a student and ECT this approach worked well but later as a teacher in Oakwood PS

doubts arose as I noticed that many who followed the same initial path as I had did not achieve similar results. I assumed the doubts reflected a deficit in my teaching practice or knowledge. I held an objective view of knowledge as a reified product which I learned, rather than recognising that the doubts were intuitive, emotional, tacit knowledge.

These doubts stimulated further study during the late 1990s in which I garnered a much deeper understanding of constructivist teaching methodologies but without developing awareness of the political and cultural forces that direct individual and systematic educational priorities. I had maintained my subjective understanding rooted in a reflexive mode that had been formed in alignment with the social ontology. Retrospectively I name this mode my insular reflexivity as my perspectives remained confluent with the cultural norms of Irish education. Confluence with culture inhibits recognition of that culture. I naively believed that education in school would benefit all children if teachers and schools used effective methodologies aligned with the principles of the curriculum. I was practice-oriented and policy was not considered relevant, which Ball (2006) suggests situates the teacher or the school as the problem (Ball, 2006, 17). Whereas I am now critical of those insular perspectives, it is an accepting criticality acknowledging that "reflexivity can only be as strong, as rigorous, as our own knowledge base" (Pillow, 2010, 275).

Emerging Researcher Reflexivity

I began this research process believing that a deficit in my knowledge contributed to my disillusion with the DES initiatives designed to improve education in disadvantaged schools. These initiatives constituted the recent history within my awareness. I suspected they curbed practice in Oakwood PS, narrowed the focus to literacy and numeracy scores as indicators of learning and consequently fractured my usual reflexivity. There was no manoeuvre room as teaching practice and assessment were becoming more prescribed and monitored. The changes in practice with which I was struggling are identified under the title of Neoliberalism (Ball, 2016) which posit education to fit the needs of global capitalism (Stronach, 2010; Connell, 2013) "embedded in three interrelated policy technologies; the market, managerialism and performativity" (Ball, 2003, 115). Before embarking on this research journey my awareness of neoliberal policy had been absent while simultaneously its derivative, NPM was affecting changes in school practice. While the rhetoric of the time

suggested that managerialism was resisted in Irish primary schools (Lynch et al., 2012, 15), the contradictions I experienced between the policies inherent in DEIS (DES, 2005) and The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011) and the unchanged principles of the curriculum suggests otherwise. At an early stage of research awareness I attributed the contradictory dilemma I experienced in school practice to the political neoliberal agenda of educational change underpinning DES policies, without an awareness of the deeper historical, structural and ideological contradictions in Irish education policy and culture (Grace, 1995).

The recently acquired recognition of neoliberal managerialism, combined with the lightly transformative personal interpretation of habitus informed the design of second-person inquiry. Retrospectively I understand that at that stage it was as if I saw the aforementioned portal as the destination rather than an opening to deeper understanding. That interim stage of understanding informed the foundation of PLACE, the central task in second-person inquiry. PLACE was designed as an effort to resist the standardisation and performativity I detected in recent DES policies, localise the curriculum to the context of the school and empower the teachers to (re)gain their professional decision making and emotional learning connections with their pupils. It was based on tacit understanding of the purpose of education reflected in the principles of the Primary Curriculum (DES, 1999,8), supported by extant research (Allen, 2002; Zyngier, 2011; Lopez, 2014). As analysis of second-person inquiry progressed I recognised that the design of PLACE was stronger on the moral virtues inherent in my primary habitus than on the intellectual virtues required for meaningful research, reflective of the distinctions made by Pring (2004). Yet it provided the medium for emerging reflexivity which Pillow defines as the task of analysing one's own experiences in the process of fieldwork (Pillow, 2010, 275), bridging yet distinguishing between the practice and research emphases of practitioner research.

Relational Reflexivity

In writing about the analysis of my own experiences, the intention is to share the difficulty of reflexively detecting and understanding my perspectives formed within the ideological enclosure revealed in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Perspectives for Bourdieu are part and parcel of the social realities they bring about, but neither these perspectives nor those social realities are mere subjective takes on

reality. Instead they are people's realities produced by the historical unfolding of a particular habitus and the environment which it is both part of and it brings about (Hage, 2013, 86). It explains how one can be subjectively aligned or confluent with cultural norms without full recognition of the culture. Confluence with culture emerged as a third theme through which to consider recent and current practice. "To understand is first to understand the field with which and against which one has been formed" (Bourdieu, 2008, 4). In the process of unravelling the historical, economic, social, denominational and political roots of my embodied cultural understanding of teaching practice within the field of Irish primary education, I gained a sense of how current education reform policies were shaped by the history of previous policies and subsequently continue to direct shared practice (Ball, 2003b) in Oakwood PS.

Practice theory (Bourdieu, 1990; Schatzki, 2003; Schatzki, 2012; Kemmis et al., 2014) suggests that practice is the organised activities of multiple people tied to both social phenomena and key psychological features of human life. Psychological or quasi-psychological matters such as reason, identity, learning and communication are both features of practice and also come to characterise people by virtue of their participation in social practices, in other words become "nonpropositional bodily ability"(Schatzki, 2012, 14) or habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). Social phenomena according to Schatzki (2012) cannot consist simply of people's actions but must comprise these actions together with, or in the context of, these practices (Schatzki, 2012, 13-15).Whereas Schatzki suggests that the nexus of "doings and sayings" (Schatzki, 2012, 15) of people convey their understanding of a practice, Kemmis includes relatings to convey the relationships inherent in practice (Kemmis et al., 2014, 31). When the composite of sayings, doings and relatings hang together to comprise a distinctive project (Kemmis et al., 2014), it makes sense to those involved, on an individual and collective level, as practice.

Practice in a primary school comprises a range of different activities or practices in their own right, which relate broadly to students' learning, teachers' teaching, teacher education, leadership and evaluation/research "comprising the Education Complex" (Kemmis et al., 2014, 51). The interrelationship of the activities inherent in the education complex underpins the theory of ecologies of practices in which practices are interdependent with other practices (Kemmis et al., 2014) and the ecological approach to teacher agency (Priestly et al., 2015), which is relevant to understanding

teachers' perceptions of their role within the complexity at the present time. An ecological approach implies that the present is temporally related to past practice and conditions which Kemmis et al. (2014) capture in the concept of practice architectures. Practice architectures encapsulate the history of the happenings of the practice and act as a kind of collective 'memory' that enable or constrain current practices (Kemmis et al., 2014, 31).

However I would argue, following on from the literature review that the concept of practice architecture does not fully encapsulate the history of practice in disadvantaged primary schools in provincial Ireland. Cultural architecture may be a more appropriate concept to capture the background mesh of interrelated historical, political, socio-economic, denominational and ideological issues which surface in contemporary practice in disadvantaged primary schools. The literature suggested that official Irish educational thinking since the 1950s has lacked criticality (O'Sullivan, 2005), while dominant views associated with a human capital purpose of education (Walsh et al., 2011; Loxley et al., 2014; Conway and Murphy, 2013), meritocratic equality (Drudy and Lynch, 1993; Kennedy and Power, 2010), denominational power in primary education (Hyland, 1996; O'Sullivan, 2005; Irwin, 2015; Norman, 2003; Coolahan et al. 2012) and deficit perceptions of disadvantaged children's abilities (Kellaghan, 2002; Cregan, 2008; Devine et al., 2013) have largely remained unchanged. Whereas practice architectures enable or constrain practice, the literature reviewed in Chapter Two reveals an interrelated set of political, denominational, social and economic conditions which prefigured a unique cultural context following the formation of the Irish State. Those mainly forgotten conditions shaped the ensuing practice architectures to the extent that a cultural architecture is a more appropriate conceptualisation to capture the interrelated nature of traditions from which current practices in Oakwood PS evolved.

Cultural architecture addresses the notion that as a teacher I was not consciously aware of the traditions which influenced my habitus and subsequently my practice and relationships. Like culture itself, the architecture becomes part of the taken-for-granted aspects of life that "leads one to imagine that one already knows, that one has understood everything, which stops research in its tracks" (Bourdieu, 1993, 32). Bourdieu's advice that one must study the historical conditions of one's own production (Bourdieu, 1988) informed the reflexive methodological rationale which

underpinned the evolving nature in this action research. Researching the history of Irish primary education in order to understand the collective features of habitus detected in second-person inquiry enabled my current relational reflexivity, which will "necessarily remain fluid, forever changing and questioning" (Pillow, 2010, 278). Relational reflexivity is the term I use to capture my understanding of the interrelationship of the past to the present and the personal to the collective. It relates practice in Oakwood PS to current education reform policies which are deeply related to the historical legacy of denominational power in Irish primary education, human capital purpose of education and socio-cultural policies which favoured some sectors of society more than others. The realisation that my position had been a favoured one emerged in the process of self-study in relation to those historical conditions and subsequently disrupted my comfort zone in which I had perceived my position differently. Reflexivity develops through the processes of doing, exemplifying and deconstructing (Stronach, 2010, 154) and takes research in unexpected directions, which I suggest could not have been foreseen in advance of the process.

Ethical Struggle of Relational Reflexivity with Professional Loyalty

Though reflexivity may have taken self-study research in unexpected directions, the core cycle of second-person inquiry remained situated in the context of practice in Oakwood PS, and maintained the initial ethical commitment of respect for participants' voices, perspectives and emotional well being. Action research aims to improve practice which involves more than the individual; it involves others too. The participants in this project accepted an invitation to engage in research designed to learn more about their understanding of their pupils' interests and lives, which aligned with the principles of the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999). Throughout the second-person inquiry their engagement had facilitated the core cycle of action research in which they disrupted their usual practice by engaging in PLACE whilst sharing their perceptions before and after their participation. Their engagement was essential for the core cycle and subsequently informed my self-study. PLACE as a task was a vehicle for learning which generated insights, reflection and learning (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, 55). Participants' evaluation of their engagement in PLACE suggested it had presented opportunities for them to question some of the taken-for-granted assumptions that had informed our practice in

Oakwood PS, while my analysis of those contributions in relation to my self-study stimulated deeper research into the historical background underpinning primary school teaching practice in Ireland. This led to the conceptualisation of a cultural architecture to capture the cultural and socio-political antecedents of our current practices. The trajectory of self-study however raised ethical challenges regarding how to evaluate the research as a whole. Participants may or may not have wanted to be involved with research which later progressed to a critical analysis of the cultural antecedents of our shared practice. Time, reflection and further analysis of self in relation to the research process enabled the interiority or self understanding that what appeared as ethical challenges reflected more on my liminal reflexive development and the dispositions inherent in my primary habitus.

I have presented the three modes of reflexive engagement; insular, emerging and relational, as stages of reflexivity. The process of research developed through these stages, temporally corresponding to my initial understanding of practice as unaffected by policy, then expanding to perceive practice as influenced by NPM policy to discovering that a cultural architecture underpins both current policies and practice. However reflexive development was not linear. Phases of reflexive awareness overlapped and the textual linear representation is appropriate only to explain that methodological reflexivity expands the relations relevant to one's practice at both an intellectual and emotional level. Through subsequent reflection, my developing interiority revealed that intellectual awareness of the limits of prior insular reflexivity embedded in my primary habitus does not erase the emotional ties inherent in its embodied knowing.

On an intellectual level, use of Pierre Bourdieu's "thinking tools" (Wacquant, 1989, 50) enabled analysis of the field of primary education in Ireland, the cultural capital valued within it alongside the habitus it engenders. In conducting the research the concept of cultural architecture emerged as significant. This conflicted with my emotional subjective sense of loyalty to my profession and to my colleagues. My primary habitus drew me into a dialectical struggle between what I had learned through research about my practice and my relations within that practice. I found I was not "immune to the power of the consensualist norms and values prevalent in Irish society" (Devine, 2005), even after I had detected the origins of that power and perceived its constraints on our profession. While I feared that others would consider

my research as fashionably anti-Catholic, I mainly feared how the findings of self-study would be interpreted by my participating colleagues. On one level it could be interpreted that they had been treated as subjects of research rather than participants in research, which was the antithesis of my intentions and of action research in general. Secondly, if it appeared that the research findings positioned my colleagues as involved in a culture that reproduces educational disadvantage, it would be emotionally damaging for them, given the dedicated attitude they demonstrated in doing their work well. Thirdly, there was the issue of Oakwood PS being under denominational management. Association with research critical of that denomination's monopoly of state primary education could potentially complicate their career progression. The ensuing tension of coming to know on one level while reluctant to voice those emerging insights on another level had not been anticipated as I designed an action research inquiry, consonant with the nature of action research as one does not know in advance what will be learned (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014,73).

I had a responsibility to my colleagues to share my insights but the fears mentioned above reduced my courage to say "out loud what no one wants to know" (Bourdieu, 2008, 112). Following the resolution to a similar dilemma in an action research project (Klocker, 2012), I resolved the tension by treating the core cycle and the reflective cycle of the integrated whole process as two separate components for feedback purposes. The findings of second-person inquiry with the six participants were considered as the outcomes of *our* research to which we had all contributed. They had engaged with me in interviews and shared their perceptions before and after engagement in PLACE. The findings which had emerged in the analysis of that second-person inquiry and had initiated further research into historical cultural antecedents of our practice were considered as *my* research for which I took responsibility.

Feedback to the participants initially focussed on the findings, described in chapter 4, in which participants had explored their assumptions, perceptions and actions through classroom action research projects informed by PLACE. Their acknowledgement of their improved relationships with children and their recognition of children's increased engagement in learning were tangible products of the second-person inquiry. Moreover that this improvement had evolved from their engagement

with the principles underpinning the Primary School Curriculum was recognition of teacher agency which has been inhibited in recent years. There was a shared recognition that most participants had been supported by their cultural and social backgrounds to benefit from the education system as it exists in Ireland which raised awareness of barriers many of our pupils' parents encounter. Their growing recognition and appreciation of parental efforts to support children was a positive finding of the core cycle. It pointed to a more intersubjective perception informing participants' perspectives following their reflective engagement in PLACE with their pupils in the context of Oakwood PS. The invidious feature of the feedback concerned reporting on the social prejudice to Travellers, prevalent in Ireland (Mac Gréil, 2011; Watson et al., 2017), I had discerned in aspects of our practice. I was uncertain as to how this aspect would be interpreted by participants and anticipated their resistance. However, as the majority of the participants had reported on the exploration of their assumptions about Travellers, the uncovering of our cultural bias facilitated the sharing of my ongoing self study that accompanied the second-person inquiry.

The reflective cycle was reported on as my self-study. I shared the journey of my personal learning, beginning with the contradiction I had experienced in my practice in Oakwood PS that stimulated the desire to understand practice better by learning to research. Starting from the position in which I could not discern the forces and structures which framed practice as it came to be understood in Oakwood PS, I reported on the stages through which the research had evolved. I shared the collective themes that emerged as I analysed second-person inquiry with them that in turn initiated my return to the literature to understand the formation of our shared habitus. I explained the difficulty I encountered in reflexively understanding how the cultural milieu had informed my perspectives. I shared the conceptualisation of a cultural architecture to capture the interrelated set of cultural, social, economic and political conditions which frame practice in primary schools to this day. I shared it as my interpretation of what I had learned. I hoped it would be of interest to them and possibly deepen their questioning of practice which had begun in their PLACE research.

Conclusion

Analysis in action research involves reflection on the process of research and data generated as the research evolves. It is a continuous and iterative process which shapes the direction and foci of the research. This chapter began with an outline of the research process, followed by the analysis of data generated with colleagues in second-person action research. On one level that analysis contributed to answering the research questions which evolved from personal engagement with Bourdieuian concepts. On another level it raised more questions which deepened self-study and began a reflexive inquiry into the cultural backdrop of my understanding as a primary school teacher in Ireland. It reflected the recursive nature of action research as I gradually became aware of the effect of that cultural backdrop on my subjectivity. While it spanned the whole research journey it reflects the importance McNiff places on "sticking with a felt need that something is worth investigating, even though one is not sure what it is" (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002, 5). She advises that insight will emerge over time if one is true to that sense of inquiry. Emergent intersubjective insights from self-study and second-person research are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Discussion of Findings

Introduction

The previous chapter analysed the core cycle and the reflective cycle separately. This chapter, in contrast, provides a holistic interpretation of the development of intersubjective awareness in teacher practice through the process of action research. Findings from engagement with colleagues in the core cycle of action research are discussed in relation to reflexive analysis of those findings and of the emergent literature which that analysis initiated. The cultural architecture which prefigured teaching practice in disadvantaged Irish primary schools has emerged as significant. This discussion explores the relevance of that finding to other teachers. The aim of this chapter is to articulate actionable knowledge. Actionable knowledge is knowledge that is theoretically robust and usable (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014), firstly in Oakwood PS, the site of the research and secondly, with potential transferability to schools in similar settings.

This chapter consists of six sections. First the prefigurative effects of historical nationalistic policies are discussed in relation to the creation of the shared primary habitus and educational experiences of the participants, prior to their engagement in ITE. Participants' reflections on ITE in Ireland suggest that their ITE experience did little to disrupt their prior conceptualisation of teaching and learning formed in their cultural milieu. The next section considers the evolution of that cultural backdrop, conceptualised in this thesis as a cultural architecture. Particular attention is placed on the interrelationship of Church and state in the creation of a unique denominational state primary schooling system and the positioning of teachers in that system. The absence of understanding surrounding those in society not in a position to engage in that system is considered in relation to the categorisation of the educationally disadvantaged. The third section moves to practice in a disadvantaged primary school and discusses the effect of the aforementioned cultural architecture on participants' perspectives, beliefs and attitudes. It considers teacher practice through the three themes of continuity, certainty and confluence which emerged in analysis of first-person self-study and second-person inquiry with colleagues. The fourth section considers the effects of more recent neoliberal inspired educational policies on practice in disadvantaged schools that had evolved within the

aforementioned cultural architecture. It suggests that such policies confine teacher practice to a technical role of compliance rather than a developmental one requiring praxis-informed educational judgement. The fifth section relates the discussion to the contradictions I had experienced in my practice in Oakwood PS prior to engagement in this research process but was unable to articulate within a practice orientation. The contradictions initiated a desire to understand which was simultaneously supported and challenged through the lens of habitus as described in chapter 5.The research reported on in this thesis is as much a report of the process of coming to think differently about one's own perspectives and practice through engagement in first and second person action research as it is about the findings of the action research. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the descriptive findings of second-person action research and the emergent themes from analysis of first and second-person inquiry. This synthesis suggests that action research is a worthwhile educational practice that contributes to knowledge of educational practice.

Teachers' Backgrounds

The participants in this action research reflect the literature findings that teachers in Ireland come from less diverse backgrounds than in other European countries (Drudy and Lynch, 1993; Darmody and Smyth, 2016), rarely from low socio-economic groups (Coolahan, 2003; Darmody and Smyth, 2016), and are predominantly female from white, middle-class, catholic families (Leavy, 2005, 174). The lack of diversity in the profession is associated with the effects of historical policies which prioritised Irish language (Coolahan, 1981; Walsh, 2016; Darmody and Smyth, 2016), supported farming and rural life (O'Hara, 1998; Tovey and Share, 2003) and facilitated the denominational management of primary schools and teacher education (Irwin, 2015; Norman, 2003; Coolahan et al., 2012). Four of the participants came from farm backgrounds, in mainly rural or small town locations. The paternalistic nature of denomination in Irish Catholic schools (Norman, 2003; Kavanagh, 1956) contributed to habitual rule following and an understanding people had of themselves which permeated family life, work, leisure and education (Inglis,1998; O'Sullivan, 2005). The participants' reports of their upbringing suggest denominational education was a taken-for-granted component of their schooling with the dominant religion interwoven in school, community and family life. These features serve to demonstrate the archetypal demographic of the participants as primary teachers.

The participants' accounts of their own parents' interest and support for their children's education was a common feature which emerged in data. Parents valued education and complied with teacher requests. Homework was prioritised in each of the homes. Parental respect for teachers was evident in data, demonstrating trust in the system, which has been described as *fides implicita* or implicit faith (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). This appears to have inhibited parents' criticism or objection to questionable teacher practice, reflecting the "catholic habitus" (Inglis, 1998, 152) arguably inculcated by the interdependence of Church in the education system. The complementarity of Church, school and home values was evident in the interview data reflecting the "relatively homogenous, closed Catholic culture" (Tovey and Share, 2003, 419), dominant in Ireland until the 1990s. The cultural capital or resources of parents raised in earlier decades provided the children with the attitudes, beliefs and a "way of being" (Hage, 2013, 81; Bourdieu, 1991, 13) compatible with school life that contributed to the shared habitus of the participants.

Moreover, the degree of similarity in their autobiographies was striking. While each participant's story was distinctly personal, the themes which emerged as relevant to this study demonstrated a common habitus. Habitus as defined by Bourdieu is an embodied history, "spontaneity without consciousness or will". When shared it produces mutual intelligible practices and understanding (Bourdieu, 1990, 56). Bourdieu suggests that habitus explains how the practices of members of the same group are always more and better harmonised than members realise. It does not imply that they experience or think identically. While each have individual characteristics, they are united in a relationship of homology defined as diversity within homogeneity (Bourdieu, 1990, 60).

Learning to Teach

Bourdieu acknowledges that one's habitus is formed by the natural immersion in one's earliest or primary environment which in all cases precedes entry to formal education (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, 42). All children absorb patterns of communication, interaction and knowledge primarily from their families. How well one subsequently fits into established social systems like schooling depends for Bourdieu on how well the body has internalised that environment (Hage, 2013, 81), through complementarity with one's primary environment. That five of the six participants recalled positive memories of primary school suggests they had

internalised the dispositions that were compatible with school. Furthermore three of the participants who did not have teacher relatives themselves credit a particular teacher from their primary schooling as a role model for their career choice. This suggests that they had identified or recognised their teachers' way of being as compatible with or admirable in their home habitus.

Of particular interest in this study is that ITE in Ireland does not appear to have raised participants' awareness of that complementarity in their own backgrounds. This observation is not about ITE in Ireland per se, but rather of teachers' perceptions of their ITE experience from their subsequent positions as teachers in a disadvantaged primary school. All five of the participants who engaged in ITE in Ireland stated that in hindsight they had not been prepared for the experiences they subsequently encountered in classrooms. The teacher who had engaged in ITE abroad had a different experience of ITE which she described as difficult and a "huge cultural change", but felt that on completion she was quite well prepared to begin teaching.

Three themes emerged from the participants reflections on ITE in Ireland. First their recollections indicated their preference as student teachers for practical experience at the expense of theoretical engagement. A common theme which emerged among them related to their perception of the substantial amount of theory in the ITE course and its irrelevance to practical situations. Theory was associated with exams and essays and ultimately qualification to teach. As one teacher concisely said that she had not been able to make connections between what she was doing as a newly qualified teacher and the theory she had studied at college. Secondly, they regretted that there had not been more observation of experienced teachers and more time allocated to teaching practice. This highlights a preference for the practicing and perfecting their prior conceptions about what teachers did. They were critical of the teaching practice they actually engaged in during ITE, suggesting it was sheltered and short-term. They recalled it as an evaluative aspect of the performance or demonstration of their ability and competence of teaching rather than an opportunity for learning about engagement in the practice of teaching. A third common theme emerged regarding their perception of their preparation during ITE for teaching in diverse, multi-cultural or socio-economic settings. They emphatically responded that they had not been prepared other than through an elective subject in EAL (English as

an Additional Language) which one participant chose. One other participant remembers studying sociology but suggested that it made little sense to her at the time other than "regurgitating" it in the exam. Other participants responded similarly suggesting it was a minor aspect of the programme for study. All five of these participants were definite in their responses that they were not prepared for the possibility that they would teach children from diverse, multicultural or socio-economic backgrounds. In particular they all agreed that Irish Traveller education was not a component of their course. These three themes suggest that engagement in ITE did not offer an adequate opportunity to disrupt or augment their conceptualisation or beliefs about being a teacher formed from their own schooling experience.

Their current criticisms of ITE did not appear to have unduly concerned them when they began their teaching careers as they had previously formed a conceptualisation of what teachers did, through their observation of teachers in their own childhoods. Two of the participants acknowledged members of their own families who were influential in their career choice, while three of the participants strove to emulate the practice of a teacher whom they said made a positive difference to their early school experience. While participants acknowledged the influence of these teachers, it has been suggested that some aspects of such influence may not be perceived by beginning teachers (Lortie, 2002). In this case the teachers did not appear to perceive the harmonisation of their parents', school and church values which had facilitated their schooling, or that such harmonisation is not present in all children's lives. As their own experience had been mainly positive, their ambition appeared clearly focussed on recreating similar experiences for their pupils. It appears from data analysed that socialisation from a young age (Richardson et al., 2014; Darmody and Smyth, 2016) contributed to these teachers desire to emulate their role models.

This desire to act like their role models reflects a disposition of *techne*, evident in craft or skill knowledge. One who works from the disposition of *techne* acts in a true and reasoned way according to the rules of the craft, and has a clear image of what is to be produced (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). The participants had an image of what a good teacher did through their autobiographical lens (Brookfield,1995), which they aimed to reproduce in order that they would be as influential for other children as their role model had been for them. Arguably this explains their preference for

observation of experienced teachers and more opportunities for teaching practice during ITE. Teaching practice during ITE was conceptualised as the verb - practice meaning to do repeatedly in order to achieve mastery of the skills of teaching, rather than as the noun practice. When conceptualised as a noun, teaching is viewed as a professional social practice with its inherent knowledge and judgements (Pring, 2004) which demands more than *techne*. It requires *praxis*, which is action informed by the moral purpose of bringing about the self development of each individual learner for personal and the collective good (Gleeson, 2009). Furthermore, to aim at the good through *praxis* is not the same as knowing with certainty what the good consists of. What constitutes good conduct in any particular case is a matter of judgement (Kemmis, 2010; Brydon-Miller and Coghlan, 2018). The student teachers' focus during ITE was on developing their own teacher skills which did not appear from their accounts to encompass the necessity of knowledge or understanding of school context or pupil backgrounds.

In contrast their accounts of their experience as ECTs in a disadvantaged school display the difficulties they encountered when their preconceived idea of being a teacher did not match their perceived reality of the experience. Of the five participants who engaged in ITE in Ireland, two remembered being shocked with their initial experiences, one described it as tough and difficult, another wondered if she had being living in a bubble prior to commencing work in Oakwood PS and the last acknowledged challenges, though she was reluctant to be more specific. The initial difficulties related to their perceptions that the children were not motivated to learn, were difficult to manage in class and that their parents were not supportive of their education, reflecting research findings in similar Irish schools (Zappone, 2002; Cregan, 2008; Devine et al., 2013; Burns, 2016). In all interviews teachers referred to their own primary school experiences for comparative purposes to explicate the difficulties they encountered suggesting that their beliefs about teaching, - formed and rooted in their childhoods, - had not been disrupted by their engagement in ITE.

Literature suggests that teacher beliefs are components of teachers' larger belief systems (Fives and Buehl, 2008; Priestly et al., 2015; Pajares , 1992; Devine et al., 2013) embedded in the habitus they acquired as children and situated within a particular cultural context. Beliefs implicitly frame the way one perceives, evaluates and reacts to situations (Pring, 2004; Priestly et al., 2015). It is the implicit nature of

beliefs that is of relevance in this discussion as it suggests one may be unaware of either the source or product of such beliefs. Devine et al (2013) suggest relevant teacher beliefs regarding their work in schools are about self, context, knowledge, pedagogy and students, which closely reflect the Educational Complex of Practices which Kemmis reminds us are ecologically related. Moreover it is acknowledged that teachers' beliefs are not immune to and are influenced by the cultural norms prevalent in a society at large (Devine, 2005, 52). That teachers acquired habitus from their families and early schooling is to be expected (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Murphy and Costa, 2016). That engagement in ITE did not challenge them to question their beliefs and perspectives reflects on broader cultural norms in Irish society. Before moving on to discuss the strategies these participants used to adapt to the unanticipated aspects of their teaching context, it is necessary to relate this discussion to the cultural context in Ireland.

Irish Cultural Influences on Teachers' Practice in Disadvantaged Schools

It is recognised particularly in periods of social change, as in the post independence era, governments and dominant groups understand that education is a powerful tool for both the "transformation and control of political subjectivities, policies, political and economic arrangements, developments in knowledge, and power relations" (Amsler, 2015, 200). It is suggested following an exploration of the literature that in Ireland the policies following political independence have affected the cultural understanding of education in five significant areas.

First, the literature reviewed demonstrated the control the Church assumed and maintained in Irish political, social and family life. It has been argued that the particular paternalistic nature of Catholicism contributed to an uncritical and consensual attitude in Irish society in general (Inglis, 1998; Lynch et al., 2012; O'Sullivan, 2005) and in primary schools especially (Norman, 2003; Irwin, 2015). As 96% of the schools are still individually managed by and teachers employed by Church authorities, goes some way to explain the traditional reluctance of primary school teachers to challenge the status quo in Catholic schools (Norman, 2003). It could be argued that the denominational control of primary schools may have curtailed many teachers' capacity for the expression of judgement or praxis.

Secondly, economic policies of the state from the 1960s onwards focussed educational purposes on preparation for work (Walsh, 2014; O'Sullivan, 2005) to the extent that currently "Ireland does not have another language of education other than that of human capital" (Loxley et al., 2014, 177). Walsh (2011) described this emphases as troubling in that it narrows the scope and quality of educational provision. However increased state investment did expand access to education to more of the population, many of whom could not previously afford secondary education. The literature review tracked the rise in participation in secondary and tertiary education of children of the farming community in particular and the widening participation gap between poorer farming and urban working class families (Tovey and Share, 2003).

The third point the literature suggests is connected with this increased access to education which embedded a meritocratic ideology in Irish society (Kennedy and Power, 2010; Drudy, 2009; Lynch et al., 2012). Many of those who improved their social position through educational achievement believed they had done so through their own efforts without full acknowledgement of the social and economic policies which enabled their progress. It is argued that ideologies of meritocracy and achievement normalise and justify social inequality, by placing the onus for success or failure squarely in the hands of the individual, which detracts from larger structural forces that ensure that some people are destined to succeed while others are destined to fail (Bourdieu, 1993; Kincheloe, 2003; Kress, 2012).

It is argued that these factors - a deep-rooted consensualism, aligned with a new meritocratic individualism set within the human capital framework of Irish education - provided a fertile ground in which to breed neoliberal policies from the 1990s onwards (Lynch et al., 2012, 10). As neoliberalism broadly refers to the agenda of economic and social transformation under the sign of the free market and the installation of the institutional arrangements to implement this project (Connell, 2013,100) it is argued a major shift in national attitudes was not required. Irish education had a long history of serving the labour market. It appears as if the combined effect of state and Church collaboration had facilitated a culture which created a niche for neoliberal subjectivities. Neoliberalism was allowed to seep into Ireland without much resistance, and by the time it came to be resisted, by some

teacher unions, it was well entrenched and institutionalised in law by the Education Act of 1998 (Lynch et al., 2012).

The neoliberal worldview has played a leading role in extending the reach of accountability systems (Conway and Murphy, 2013). In the field of education there are three main types of accountability system: (a) compliance with regulations, (b) adherence to professional norms, and (c) results driven (Anderson, 2005, 1). Anderson (2005) suggests that accountability systems embody prevailing societal values and aspirations, which the literature shows is particularly true in the Irish primary system (Conway and Murphy, 2013), as Irish teachers have always been accountable to the cultural expectations of their role. What differentiates neoliberal accountability from the historical tradition in Ireland is the installation of the institutional and bureaucratic arrangements to copper-fasten it to the aims of the state in the Education Act (Ireland, 1998a). The subsequent "small moves, initiatives and reforms" (Ball, 2015) gradually revealed the new accountabilities as being to the state and predominately its economic needs (DES, 2011) driven by "the new high priests of capitalism in Irish political and cultural life" (Lynch et al., 2012, 30). Primary school teachers working in Catholic managed schools however are positioned as accountable to the sometimes contradictory expectations of state and Church.

The final point of discussion is how the concept 'educational disadvantage' is understood by the hegemonic meritocratic ideology incubated within this human capital educational framework. While the literature portrays decades of intervention by the state and Church to address the needs of the educationally disadvantaged, it acknowledges the paucity of understanding that underpinned those interventions (O'Sullivan, 2005; Drudy, 2009; Zappone, 2007). State reaction to the *Report of the Educational Disadvantage Committee* shows that critique of the systematic interventionist approach was unwelcome (DES, 2005), and that established approaches persisted despite alternative recommendations. The publication of the politically significant document *The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020* (DES, 2011), indicates a continuation of both the interventionist approach and a lack of willingness to examine the human capital understanding of education. It is argued in this thesis that

such policies do little to support a broader conceptualisation of education as responsive to diversity in Irish primary schools.

The preceding discussion has contextualised the culture within the social, economic and political environment in which the participants in this research were raised and educated. It relates to the reflexive analysis of self-study in which I discerned the influence of this cultural architecture on my perspectives and practice, which formed the theme of confluence of practice with culture. It is plausible that other teachers have been similarly influenced. The next section explores this possibility by discussing participants' perspectives as experienced teachers, familiar with Oakwood PS. In addition analysis of findings in second person research generated two other themes: continuity of perspectives and certainty of beliefs. While these themes were recurring, they were not constant and at times were contradictory. Each of the three themes will frame the discussion in the next section, beginning with participants' perspectives as experienced teachers prior to engaging in action research.

Experienced Teachers Working in Oakwood Primary School

Continuity of Perspectives

At the outset of this chapter, it was suggested that a complementarity of home and school habitus had influenced participants' career choice. It also appears that the compatibility of ECTs with experienced teacher habitus facilitated ECTs' adaptation into their role. As ECTs, they placed their trust in more experienced teachers to guide them in dealing with the unexpected aspects of their teaching role. The support of established teachers along with learning from the experience gained in the intervening years were the two factors all participants suggested as most influential on their professional learning. This reflects the sustainability of shared teacher habitus in Ireland which produces mutual intelligible practices and understanding. It also continues a pattern of *techne* established in both their formative and ITE experience. This continuity is subtle, as participants were clear on the aspects of practice from their own schooling they endeavoured to not reproduce. Four participants stressed how their practice was more caring of children's feelings compared with what they had either observed or experienced as children.

Four participants' preference for CPD courses which emphasised the practical side of recommended teaching methodologies demonstrated a continuity of professional

learning style evident in their ITE recollections. The CPD offered through PDST aligned with their preferred learning style. However the two participants who had described the beginning of the teaching careers as a particularly challenging period reflected a different subsequent experience of CPD. Both had contemplated changing career, one during ITE and the other as an ECT. Both had subsequently engaged in long-term post-graduate courses related to pedagogy. It appears as if both had engaged to develop their practice on their volition rather than in compliance with practice requirements. They were reflective on how their post-graduate experiences had transformed their perspectives regarding aspects of their practice.

Perceptions regarding parental involvement in education, formed in participants' childhoods, endured to varying degrees. While understanding of the challenges they perceived some parents encountered five participants indicated that parental support was necessary for their children's educational progress. Some parents were considered by the teachers to not adequately support their children's education. Deficit views expressed about parents, who did not supervise homework, help their children organise school requisites or engage with school related activities, reflected similar findings in Ireland (Cregan , 2008; Burns, 2016; Zappone, 2007). Deficit views of parents' unwillingness or inability to adequately support their children's education were consistently expressed, either implicitly or explicitly in participants' interviews. The teachers were positive in their assessments of children's potential, but some expressed the view that without parental input those children were deemed to have less of a chance to reach their academic potential or realise, as one teacher said "what education could do for them". While views about parental involvement in education show continuity of teachers' formative perspectives, they also encompass certainty that with appropriate parental support full engagement in school will enhance subsequent life opportunities.

Certainty of Beliefs

> *A lot of our parents ... have negative perceptions of education themselves. If only you could change that, to make them see that their child has the potential to go on and do great things.* (Denise)

The certainty of belief in the possibilities of education expressed by participants is captured in the quote above. Two aspects of this belief require consideration. First the assumption that parental perceptions are currently misaligned does not recognise

the influence of experiences and position on one's perceptions. It implies ontological neutrality where reality is objectively viewed as the same for all. According to Bourdieu the social realities people perceive are not mere subjective views, but actual realities produced by the historical unfolding of personal and environmental positions (Hage, 2013, 86). However the subjective nature of perceptions which align with the dominant hegemonic position in Irish education is obscured by consensualism. The individual subjectivity merges with the social ontology (Schatzki, 2003). The equally subjective element of some parental perceptions appears at odds with accepted and dominant reality. This dominant reality confers an apparent solidarity, palpability and actuality which gives our social world, its "taken-for-granted-ness" as the world we live in (Kemmis et al., 2014, 6).

The second point relates to teachers' perspectives on 'potential'. Potential is a future orientated word and in Irish education is often narrowly linked to future occupation (O'Sullivan, 2005; Walsh, 2014; Loxley et al., 2014). In light of the dominance of human capital theory in Irish educational policy (Loxley et al., 2014, 177), it is not surprising that five participants related children's engagement in school with acquisition of subsequent qualifications for employment. Generally in Ireland, further education or employment options depend on the results of the Leaving Certificate exam at the completion of secondary school. The backwash in primary school from the exam's perceived importance was evident in the participants' narratives. All teachers acknowledged their main role was to enable children to gain proficiency in literacy and numeracy, through incremental gains each year to achieve the standards required as measured by performance on standardised tests. Arguably this concern about test scores was exacerbated by the recent similar emphasis of DES policy (DES, 2011). Teachers' expressed need to place extra emphasis on literacy and numeracy appears to be a compensatory reaction linked to their deficit view of parents' inability to provide adequate educational support for their children interwoven with a determination to support children's educational opportunities while showing continuous improvements in outcomes to DES.

The findings of this research suggest that the belief displayed by participants that the purpose of education is to improve one's future potential affects teachers' current evaluation of children's strengths, needs and abilities. The teachers were all confident that they knew their pupils well, based on their current assessment and engagement

with the children. Some children's lack of interest in school subjects was interpreted by teachers' as the children's lack of motivation around learning, which reflects an epistemological view in which knowledge is both reified and external to the knower (Sullivan et al., 2016, 123). Teachers' view of knowledge influences the way in which children's learning is evaluated, which in turn impacts on teachers' knowledge of children.

The opening quote embodies the meritocratic ideology commonly referenced in literature on Irish education (Kennedy and Power, 2010; Drudy, 2009; Lynch et al., 2012) and experienced by the teachers themselves. It suggests certainty or belief that engagement in and with school practices enables one to achieve further benefits in life. However, it portrays a lack of awareness of the social and political influences on education policy in Ireland. O'Sullivan (2005) suggests meritocratic ideology conceals the other influential factors which impact education attainment from the critical interpretation of education personnel. As discerned in other countries, teachers have been rendered deficient in the critical repertoire necessary to recognise the domination of their perceptions by social and political factors (Ball, 2003b; Sachs, 2016; Stronach, 2010) On the other hand, to suggest that teachers are responsible for this deficiency given the historical, social and political components of the cultural milieu in Ireland is akin to suggesting that those who are disadvantaged are responsible for their situation. It appears more likely that teachers' repertoires of practice have evolved in response to the cultural environment in which they are immersed.

Confluence of Teachers' Practice with Irish Culture

It is suggested here that both of these themes - continuity of perspectives and certainty of beliefs discerned in teachers' practice discourse - are encapsulated within the unique cultural context of Irish society (Devine, 2005; O'Sullivan, 2005). In the preceding chapter, reflexive analysis detected how this unique cultural context informed the cultural architecture underpinning current practice in primary schools, which was classified as the theme of confluence of teachers' practice with Irish culture. Confluence implies a flowing together and merging in which the distinctive properties of practice and culture blend in ontological existence which operates below the level of conscious awareness and in ordinary everyday life appears as taken-for-granted reality.

Data indicated aspects of the accepted reality that participants were deeply invested in changing, in particular the underachievement of disadvantaged children's educational attainment. Not only were teachers motivated to improve children's educational achievement from a personal and socialised moral point of view, in the current climate teachers in disadvantaged schools perceive themselves as accountable to show continuous improvements in children's literacy and numeracy attainment. However the findings of this research suggest that deeply embedded confluent cultural forms influence teachers' practice, without their conscious awareness, which militate against their teaching intentions.

Analysis of the findings revealed teachers' intentions revolved around motivating and engaging the children in school related activities, in order to acquire the knowledge and skills which would enable them to engage in further learning. The knowledge and skills of literacy and numeracy that are currently measured in national assessments were prioritised. In their practice teachers drew on resources from their own experience, collaboration with colleagues, their engagement with CPD and material resources provided in the school or by other professional or voluntary agencies. In the junior classes, children's interests and stories provided a resource for oral language and writing activities. Otherwise teachers planned and chose the content for children's learning activities in school, based on their assessment of children's interests or their interpretation of children's needs. The children's lives outside school, their parents, communities or interests were not incorporated by these teachers as a possible resource on which to plan further learning activities.

On the surface it appeared that teachers' practice in Oakwood PS did not reflect the principles that underpin the curriculum in which it explicitly states that the child’s language, prior learning and cultural background constitutes the context for learning (DES, 1999, 8). The principles of the Primary School Curriculum (1999) emphasise the dynamic nature of knowledge and the central role of teacher interpretation of children's prior knowledge and experience (DES, 1999). The implicit presupposition suggests teachers have an understanding of children's prior knowledge and experience. Praxis underpins the assumption that teachers make judgements regarding the appropriate content and methodologies they evaluate as suitable for the specific school context and their specific children. Analysis of findings on the other hand, indicated that teachers' view of the curriculum acted as a constraint on their

agency to make professional judgements. Numerous references suggested they were under time pressure to 'cover' the curriculum, as if it was a syllabus. The literature review outlined the contradictory messages teachers received in the years following the introduction of the Primary School Curriculum in 1999 (Kennedy, 2013; Loxley et al, 2007). A principle led curriculum which envisioned a praxis role for teachers was delivered in the technocratic tradition that treated knowledge as objective and transmittable to pupils. Teachers were positioned as implementers of the planned curriculum (Gleeson, 2009) in keeping with curriculum tradition in Ireland (Walsh, 2016).

The dichotomy between the principles and practice exemplified in curriculum tradition reflects broader contradictions in the evolving culture which informed the cultural architecture of primary schooling in Ireland since the formation of the state. The contradictions inherent in the Church/state nexus of control, the prioritisation of human capital theory and the subsequent rise in meritocratic ideology escaped critical analysis in the conservative, nationalistic and anti-intellectual socio-political sphere produced by and reproduced in the new state (Lynch et al., 2012; Gleeson, 2009). Teachers entered the practice of teaching with interpretations of practice and relationships acquired over a lifetime of immersion in this cultural architecture. Gleeson (2009) suggests these socio-cultural influences are refracted in curriculum policy and practice. The prevailing technical paradigm perpetuates the status quo and the notion of curriculum neutrality.

It is suggested in this thesis that the principles/practice divide detected in curriculum interpretation enmeshes teachers further in the dominant cultural understandings. On the one hand the underpinning principles align with their habitus, their experience and their belief that education in school is of value to individuals. They were existentially motivated to reproduce similar experiences for future generations. On the other hand within the technical paradigm teachers are focussed on the end product and the most effective means of achieving it. They use the resources about which they are certain, mainly their own skills, knowledge and understanding. They do not interpret the curriculum as a resource for learning about the children's context, community or culture, which arguably reflects the dominance of the monoculture (O'Toole, 2017) in which they were raised and educated. Menter (2008) recognises that not only is culture interwoven throughout teachers' work, but also that their

work leads to the re/creation of that culture (Menter, 2008, 58). It is suggested here that culture and practice are confluent. Confluence makes it difficult for teachers to be aware of the aspects of their practice that are culturally conditioned.

Influence of Neoliberal Policy on Individual and Collective Practice

In addition to the cultural predisposition to maintain the status quo, the Irish government has introduced education policies grounded in neoliberal ideology. Disadvantaged schools were the testing ground for these policies. For instance, in addition to the generic CPD provided for all teachers in curriculum implementation (Kennedy, 2013; Loxley et al, 2007), teachers in disadvantaged schools received additional CPD, in literacy and numeracy programmes as part of the *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS) programme. In some cases a cascade approach was used in which one teacher from a school attended the CPD and was then expected to lead the implementation of a particular programme in the school, supported by a regional co-ordinator. The cascade approach further supports a technicist view of teaching where skills and knowledge are given priority over attitudes and values (Kennedy, 2005). Schools were expected to implement and were subsequently evaluated on the visibility of the prescribed programmes in teachers' practice. The message was relayed that adherence to the requirements of the programmes would solve the achievement problem (Kennedy, 2013, 515). As teachers embraced the programmes, and the additional requirements of DEIS, they had little opportunity in the available CPD to expand their broader understanding of educational disadvantage in the context of their work. Moreover it is recognised that in similar situations teachers do not have space to see an alternative to their practice as they are distracted with details and absorbed in conforming to the demands created by the current system (Agostinone-Wilson, 2013).

DEIS relied heavily on depoliticised approaches to schooling in which the socio-political aspects of inequality were not addressed (Kitching, 2010, 222). It has been argued that such a depoliticised approach results in inadequate clarity for teachers between performance requirements and the contradictory obligations generated (Sachs, 2016, 416) which leads to compliant and risk averse teacher practices. Moreover teachers and schools are held accountable for pupil underachievement, not only by the system but by teachers themselves (Ball, 2006; Ball, 2016; Sachs, 2016).

Neoliberalism affects more than just policy direction; it "affects interpersonal relations, identity and subjectivity" (Ball, 2016, 1047). Ball suggests that neoliberalism enters into one's thinking and valuing about what is done as practice. What can be measured becomes valued, thus distorting educational judgements (Biesta, 2009; Stronach, 2010) Techne-influenced attention is drawn to performance on measurable indicators rather than on the praxis-informed judgements inherent in practice based on the principles underpinning the curriculum.

Oakwood PS had embraced the DEIS initiative in the belief it would enable our pupils to achieve better educational outcomes. Data generated with participants prior to their engagement in action research reflected the targets of DEIS. Attention was focussed on covering the curriculum and on showing improvements in literacy and numeracy scores. Gradually less time was allocated to non-core subjects as literacy and numeracy were prioritised. It took time to recognise the shift in emphasis that occurred. Partly this was due to the reduction in staff following the economic downturn of 2008. Despite there being fewer teachers, schools were still expected to implement educational interventions designed to "improve learning outcomes substantially for all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds"(DES, 2011).

These interventions were not reflective of the principles inherent in the Primary School Curriculum (1999) which envisaged that teachers would make judgements regarding the appropriate content and methodologies they evaluated as appropriate for the specific context and their specific children. While in 1999 teachers were expected to evaluate and judge what practice was appropriate, by 2011 they were evaluated and judged on the outcomes they achieved. Whereas now it is possible to retrospectively identify this shift in the positioning of teachers since the implementation of the Education Act (Ireland,1998a), the actual shifting over that timeframe was indiscernible. Within a practice orientation I lacked the critical intellectual capacity to understand the gradual and incremental policy-led changes. Yet I was uneasy about the direction of practice in the school as it did not centre on children as much as it centred on data about children. On the one hand the data looked impressive while on the other improving data overshadowed the aspirational teaching and learning relationship inherent in the Primary School curriculum. A

desire to resolve the contradictions experienced provided the impetus to begin this research journey as outlined in chapter one of this thesis.

Developing Intersubjective Awareness through Action Research

The analysis chapter outlined how the process of doing research was central to my evolving understanding of how practice is shaped by political, social and economic policies both current and historical. Reflexive engagement with Bourdieu's theoretical framework initiated this understanding. Even though second-person action research was put in place at a stage when my understanding was limited to the individual sphere of habitus, the process of analysing data raised the collective sphere of habitus as an essential component in understanding perceptions of disadvantaged education in Ireland. In turn, this prompted an exploration of the antecedents of collective habitus. This brought me from an initial practice orientation to one that considered how the ecology of practices is shaped by current and historical policies. Whilst the action research was designed with a limited theoretical understanding, it provided a medium through which deeper leaning could occur.

It also provided a medium for participants to reflect on and discuss their practice. A notable trend emerged when the themes from analysis were overlaid on the descriptive findings in chapter four. When teachers had the opportunity to engage in action research with their pupils they questioned their prior assumptions, perceptions and practices. Table 6.1 builds on the summary of findings and illustrates this shift towards questioning the certainties, continuities and confluent aspects of practice that were previously taken-for-granted. The Action Learning column shows that following engagement in PLACE participants were more inclined to question their prior perspectives and more aware of the constraints these perspectives had on their practice with pupils. For instance following engagement in PLACE teachers displayed a more intersubjective awareness of parental interest and support for their children's education compared with their prior deficit views. Action Research acted as a catalyst to facilitate teacher reflection. It allowed for cracks to emerge in the certainty, continuity and culture that contribute to the reproduction of the dominant status quo.

Table 6.1: Synthesis of Findings with Emergent Analytical Themes

Theme	Prior to Action Research	Following Action Research	Action Learning
	Unexamined Assumptions	**Recognition of Assumptions**	
Continuity from habitus	Children's lack of motivation to learn from teacher	Children's motivation to engage in learning with teacher	Questioning prior assumptions
Confluence of culture with habitus	Lack of parental interest in children's education	Recognition of parental interest and engagement	Intersubjective acknowledgement of cultures
Certainty of reified view of knowledge	Adequate Teacher knowledge of school community	Realisation of the limits of prior community knowledge	Intersubjective acknowledgement of local knowledge as valuable
Continuity of social ontology	Social prejudice about other cultures/groups	Recognition of knowledge and customs of other groups	Intersubjective acknowledgement of other habitus
	Prior Perceptions	**Changed Perceptions**	
Continuity and confluence with culture	Teacher focus on deficits of context, pupils and parents through perspectives informed by habitus	Recognition of strengths, attributes and diversity of context, pupils and parents informed through engagement	Disruption of continuity in culturally informed judgements
Continuity and certainty of teacher role	Constrained practice	Enabled to practice	Engaged in the space between planned curriculum and the lived curriculum
Teacher led certainty	Under pressure to cover curriculum	Enjoyed responsive curriculum	Pupil and teacher engaged practice
Techne-led confluence	Lack of teaching time	Engaged in learning time	Praxis-informed judgements
Techne-led confluence	Lack of teacher agency	Evidence of teacher agency and judgements	Praxis-informed judgements
	Prior Actions	**Changed Actions**	
Continuity and confluence	Compliant with Good Practice Guidelines	Practice more aware and responsive to children's interests	Questioning prior continuity and confluence
Certainty of knowledge	Detailed planning in advance	Combination of advance and responsive planning	Action based on praxis

Conclusion of Discussion

This chapter reflected on a research journey I travelled since 2012, beginning with a practice orientation and coming to understand how my practice was framed by the cultural architecture unique to Ireland. That cultural architecture has particular significance in contexts categorised within the culture as disadvantaged. The research was stimulated by the desire to reflect the principles of the Primary Curriculum in the school practice. The chapter acknowledges that second-person inquiry was initiated before full understanding of the antecedents of current practice was adequately developed. Yet the analysis of findings of that second-person inquiry engendered deeper research which contributed to the development of interiority in a process of intellectual self-awareness (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, 52).

Secondly, it facilitated other participants' engagement in a process of action research in which their perspectives were valued and heard. Reflection on their classroom

action research projects enabled their recognition of contextual strengths and attributes which had previously been obscured through the taken-for-granted familiarity induced through the continuity and certainty induced by the cultural architecture.

Action research as an approach builds on the past, takes place in the present with a view to shaping the future (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014). It is suggested in this thesis that the value of this approach is that one can progress knowledge, even if starting from a limited conception of the influences of the past on present perspectives and practice. Participants' future practice in Oakwood PS will potentially be based on their intersubjective awareness of the diverse knowledge base of pupils in the school context. That the praxis-informed judgements of teachers envisioned in the Primary School Curriculum can facilitate this intersubjective awareness is actionable knowledge.

> Action research begins with what we don't know, and seeks to find what we don't know. What we don't know that we don't know is the particular fruit of action research.
>
> (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, 163)

Chapter 7: Conclusion: Towards Recognition of Cultural Architecture in Policy and Practice.

Introduction

This thesis reported on an evolutionary research process which began with a dilemma in my practice as principal of a disadvantaged primary school in a large provincial Irish town. A contradiction in practice had arisen between the broad educational principles underpinning the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999) and the narrower focus on literacy and numeracy standards as indicators of children's learning and teachers' teaching, emanating from national policy (DES, 2011). Practice in the school had become overly concerned with producing data required to demonstrate continuous improvements in literacy and numeracy scores on the annual standardised tests. At a tacit embodied level this practice did not align with my educational values, while on a professional level I was responsible for improving children's educational experience. The distinction was difficult to articulate. I was conscious I lacked the theoretical knowledge to challenge the "relevant research" (DES, 2011, 7) which underpinned the national policy and directed our practice. I decided to become "research literate" (BERA, 2014, 5) to learn how to improve children's educational experience and simultaneously meet the requirements of national policy. I sought the knowledge of what to do. Instead I was challenged to question the beliefs and assumptions which underpinned my ontological being and stance. The process of research enabled identification and articulation of gaps in my embodied epistemological understanding. Personal engagement with the theoretical framework provided by Pierre Bourdieu helped me to start to think differently and begin this process of learning which connected meaningfully and emotionally with me. It enabled me to view my practice in Oakwood PS as situated within the cultural architecture which frames educational policy and practice in Ireland.

This chapter reflects on the process of engaging in action research to understand one's own practice. The first section reports on the practice orientated, second-person action research that had emerged from my initial, though unknowingly limited, engagement with Bourdieu's theoretical framework. The research questions were framed from within that practice orientation. While the second-person action research answered the research questions it also stimulated deeper inquiry which

explored my practice orientation. The limitations of the second person research are outlined. The second section reflects on the deeper engagement with Bourdieuian reflexivity and concepts that emerged from analysis of the second-person findings and ongoing self-study. Awareness of the interrelationship of the past and present social conditions emerged as a significant component for understanding practice. Reflection on both cycles led to the conceptualisation of Cultural Architecture as a means to capture the influences of historical policies on current individual and collective ontology.

The third section considers the relevance this research has for practice in disadvantaged primary schools in Ireland. It suggests that action research is an appropriate approach to support the understanding of practice from within that practice. Policy on teacher education in Ireland recognises and respects such teacher research (Teaching Council, 2016, 8), therefore it is important that teachers are enabled to engage in the research process. This research demonstrates that research from within practice can contribute to both theoretical and practical knowledge. It contends that neither form of knowledge is superior to the other, but together they constitute actionable knowledge which is useful to practitioners and policy developers. I hope the report of my reflexive engagement with Bourdieuian concepts which enabled me to think differently about what I had taken for granted encourages other practitioners to engage in researching their own practice. The process has been transformative for me. It may be of interest to others, particularly teachers and those involved in ITE and career long teacher education.

Second-Person Inquiry

Engagement with Bourdieu's theoretical framework of cultural capital, habitus and field as they applied to my position as a pupil, student and teacher revealed that aspects of my upbringing had facilitated my progression in school. Progression to school was supported in a way that was indiscernible and appeared natural to me as it happened. Reflection on previously unrecognised supports raised my consciousness of barriers those without similar supports encounter in the education system. As I wanted to explore practice in Oakwood PS with other teachers working there, I began by framing questions that emerged from my initial and individual engagement with Bourdieu's theoretical framework to guide the exploration. Those questions and synopsised findings are reported below. The synopsised descriptive findings

suggest that participating teachers also viewed practice through the lens of their own autobiographies (Stigler and Hiebert, 1999; Brookfield, 1995) prior to engaging in an action research intervention designed for them to learn more about their pupils' cultural capital. I had hoped that the process of learning about and from children's contextual knowledge would stimulate participants' questioning of current practice in Oakwood PS.

1. In what ways do teachers' habitus and cultural capital influence their teaching practice in this school?

Data suggested that early socialisation of the participants into the school system which was compatible with and supported by their families initiated a mainly uninterrupted trajectory through the education system to their qualification as teachers. It was evident from their recollections that their parents' and teachers' values aligned. They had acquired a "way of being" (Hage, 2013, 81; Bourdieu, 1991, 13) compatible with school life that demonstrated their shared habitus. Five participants referred to specific teachers who either taught them in primary school or were related to them as role models who had influenced their choice of career. Their conceptualisation of teaching practice was formed through their experiences with these role models (Lortie, 2002; Delaney, 2017). This desire to act like their role models reflects a disposition of *techne*, evident in craft or skill knowledge (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). The findings pointed to the influence of cultural capital and habitus on the early formation and subsequent maintenance of participants' teaching practice views.

2. To what extent do teachers' habitus influence their perceptions of indigenous cultural capitals and related habitus of the children they teach?

Participants regularly referred to their own schooling and parental support to contrast with the deficit perceptions they held about parental support for children in Oakwood PS. In turn these deficit perceptions influenced their expectations for some pupils. Their recollection of ITE in Ireland suggests that their conceptualisation of the role of teacher was neither disrupted nor augmented during their ITE which they felt left them unprepared for the diverse situations they encountered as they began teaching. It appeared as if their techne disposition confined their perspectives on how teachers should teach, how children should learn and how parents should support this teaching and learning in order to recreate their own positive schooling experiences

for their pupils. This reflects Bourdieu's perceptive evaluation that people rarely talk about the social world in order to say what it is, but almost always to say what it ought to be (Bourdieu, 1993, 22). It appeared from the data that participants' habitus inhibited their perceptions of indigenous and other ways of being and knowing.

3. How do teachers interpret the curriculum to meet the learning needs of children with diverse habitus and cultural capitals?

Data generated with participants highlighted the contested nature of the concept 'the curriculum' (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Aoki, 1993; Elliott, 1998; Kelly, 2009; Alexander, 2010; Pinar, 2012; Kemmis et al., 2014). Often curriculum is equated with the word syllabus, limiting it to the consideration of the content or body of knowledge to be transmitted or list of subjects to be taught (Kelly, 2009, 9) whereas it can also be conceptualised as the totality of the experiences a pupil has in school that enable multidimensional learning. Multidimensional learning relates to three different domains of education (Biesta, 2015). The first is that of qualification; which has to do with the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, skills and dispositions. The second is socialisation in which children are initiated into the traditions and ways being and doing, such as cultural, professional, political and religious traditions. The third domain is subjectification which concerns the way children come to exist as subjects of initiative and responsibility rather than as objects of the actions of others (Biesta, 2015, 78). These three domains are reflected in the three general aims of the Irish Primary School Curriculum (1999) which expresses the vision of education as:

- to enable the child to live a full life as a child and to realise his or her potential as a unique individual
- to enable the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others and to contribute to the good of society
- to prepare the child for further education and lifelong learning (through the acquisition of knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes and the ability to think critically) (DES, 1999, 7)

These aims reflect a broad and balanced curriculum indicative of a multidimensional purpose of education in which the three domains can be distinguished, but cannot really be separated. Each domain intersects with the other two and how balance is

achieved between all three highlights the essential role of teacher judgement in relation to each individual pupil's learning needs.

The centrality of teacher judgement as a component of the curriculum was clearly articulated in the text of the Primary Curriculum (1999). It envisioned a complex role for teachers who would interpret and respond to the child's learning needs to integrate the child's existing knowledge and competence in a way that would contribute to the expansion of the child's conceptual framework (DES, 1999, 20). The teacher would exercise "professional discretion in planning and directing the learning process" (DES, 1999, 20) in order to provide effective learning experiences. Moreover the principles of the curriculum envisaged the active engagement of the child in the learning process and explicitly stated that the child's language, prior learning and cultural background constitutes the context for learning (DES, 1999, 8). The Primary Curriculum was underpinned by a philosophy of phronesis and envisaged action of a praxis nature for teachers. It acknowledged the complexity and tension of education in school and envisaged teachers engaging in the space between the planned curriculum text and the lived curriculum experience of individuals (Aoki, 1993). The curriculum-as-plan frames a set of curriculum statements and recommendations for the teacher, whereas the lived curriculum deals with the multiplicity of interests, personalities and humanness of the classroom situation (Aoki, 1993; Magrini, 2015; Olson, 2012).

It appeared from data generated in this research that prior to engaging in the intervention that participants struggled to perceive this space of multiplicity. While they interpreted the curriculum through the space in which they had experienced learning as children they also perceived the curriculum through the lens of the 'National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020' (DES, 2011). They reported feeling pressurised to raise literacy and numeracy standards and regularly referred to time constraints that inhibited their practice. They spoke of "covering the curriculum" in a way that reflected a technical implementation interpretation of it. There was little evidence in data to suggest that participants had knowledge of children's cultural capital, apart from that generated with those teaching in junior classes. It became apparent that teachers did not have a means of or a purpose for learning about the lives of children or the school

community as they were focussed on the qualification and socialisation domains of education which aligned with their habitus.

4. How does engaging in action research contribute to teachers' acknowledgement of indigenous cultural diversity in this school?

The central space of the second-person inquiry with participants in this research was a classroom intervention called PLACE. It was designed to facilitate teacher engagement with the lived experiences of the children they taught as envisaged in the Primary School Curriculum. Engagement in PLACE appeared to enhance participants' acknowledgement of their pupils' cultural diversity, prior learning and way of being.

Participants reported learning about aspects of children's lives which they had not known, including personality traits, religious and cultural traditions, and family relationships. They spoke more positively about their pupils' abilities, characteristics and interests. There was a more appreciative tone to discussions of parental practice. Improved relationships, classroom behaviour and motivation were noted by some. Engagement in PLACE enabled some participants to question their perspectives. Some recognised that assumptions they had previously held were erroneous which created a space for them to begin to perceive practice intersubjectively with their pupils. Engagement in PLACE posed challenges and created dilemmas for some participants but also demonstrated their ability to make judgements to resolve dilemmas to varying degrees. The findings also uncovered aspects of some participants' implicit bias against indigenous Travellers.

Initially as data was generated I engaged with it at the level of current practice. It appeared as if action research had the capacity to reset teaching practice in Oakwood PS to respond to the context and begin to resist the narrowing focus of recent DES policy. When given the space and opportunity most of the participants had reflected on their practice and questioned their assumptions. They had derived enjoyment and satisfaction from learning with their pupils and had demonstrated that they could engage with the curriculum in the complexity and multiplicity of Oakwood PS. It appeared at that stage as if my initial individual reflexive engagement with Bourdieu's theoretical framework had provided a catalyst to develop a second-person inquiry with my colleagues, which in turn stimulated their questioning of practice. It

had the potential to change aspects of future practice in the school as all six participants stated they would continue to incorporate children's interests in their practice the following year.

Limitations of Second-Person Research in Oakwood PS

Although the learning process continued to unfold, I bounded the research after the second cycle of second-person inquiry for the purposes of this dissertation (Herr and Anderson, 2005). The opportunities and challenges it had presented in Oakwood had been recorded and reflected on throughout the process. I was confident this research could inform local knowledge, but uncertain about what contribution it would make to the wider education community as it was a small scale study based in one setting. Two of the limitations of the design were apparent from the start, namely the low number of participants and my position as both researcher and principal teacher in the school. The research was designed with the context of Oakwood PS in mind, therefore from a practice perspective, it could be relevant to schools in similar contexts (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, 172). Although there were only six participants they were archetypal of primary teachers in Ireland (Darmody and Smyth, 2016). Their experiences could provide vicarious learning for other teachers who were similarly positioned should they judge it to have relevance to their situation (Stake, 1986; Herr and Anderson, 2005; Coghlan and Brannick, 2014).

The dual roles of principal teacher and researcher created a different set of limitations. At the start I was aware that my insider status as principal teacher could inhibit my perception of the context of Oakwood PS and of the participating colleagues with whom I had an established relationship. It is feasible that another researcher in a different position would have generated different data with the participants. Action research literature suggests that a principal teacher also acting as researcher engaged with colleagues is problematic from ethical and trustworthiness point of view (Anderson et al., 2007, 10). It is suggested that teachers may feel coerced into participating and not feel empowered to voice their opinions especially if their views differ from those of the principal. As my motivation initially related to practice in Oakwood PS, I chose to proceed with action research and emphasised an ethical stance from the outset to reduce the risk of such maleficence. On the other hand it is plausible that my knowledge of the context and the participants enriched

the research as self-study continued in parallel with second-person inquiry and guided my focus to the aspects of the research that data did not answer.

Interim Evaluation of Second-Person Action Research

Notwithstanding the limitations of the second-person inquiry I assessed the process as worthwhile for our school on two levels. At a practice level it had created opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice and in the process improve their knowledge of their pupils and the community of Oakwood PS. Both teachers and pupils had enjoyed learning with each other and improved relationships engendered more respectful interactions. Most especially I was pleased that participating teachers had started to question some of their taken-for-granted assumptions about children and parents in Oakwood PS through their own reflection on their learning in action research.

At an emerging researcher level I recognised that the careful construction of the second-person research design specifically tailored for Oakwood PS had enabled participants to engage in practice that aligned with the principles of the Primary Curriculum (1999). It had enabled their praxis-informed judgements. Continuous reflection and evaluation of second-person inquiry as it evolved had ensured that participants were supported in their engagement and that the design was adapted as the cycles progressed to be more collaborative. As the researcher I was satisfied I had facilitated their sharing of concerns, dilemmas and challenges and their judgement of resolutions. The ethical stance which had underpinned the research design and conduct had facilitated the inclusion of all six voices even when some perspectives were difficult to reconcile with the values of respect for diversity that underpins primary education in general. The interim evaluation of the process of engaging with others demonstrated that the nine characteristics outlined in chapter three which underpin action research as an approach (Titchen, 2015) supported the research in Oakwood PS.

Concurrently I became aware that the second-person inquiry raised more unknowns than I had anticipated. That is the nature of action research as a methodology (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002; Coghlan and Brannick, 2014; Herr and Anderson, 2005). The inquiry evolves. Analysis of second-person research findings raised questions about the collective habitus of participants and researcher. Analysis

transitioned the inquiry from a practice orientation to one of reflexive practitioner researcher and began an investigation into the cultural backdrop of my understanding as a primary school teacher in Ireland. However I suggest that reflexive research emerged from the process of practice oriented research.

Reflexive Engagement

While second-person inquiry was beneficial for practice in Oakwood PS, themes emerged in analysis of the findings which the original research questions had not anticipated. In particular the two themes of continuity of perspectives and certainty in beliefs shared by participants pointed to a collective habitus. Stepping back from second-person inquiry and reflecting on the collective findings raised my awareness of the broader historical interpretation of Bourdieu's theoretical framework to understand the nature of practice (Bourdieu, 1990; Grace, 1995). This was the critical link that connected the concrete experience of personal habitus and current practice in Oakwood PS to the deeper understanding of the ecological nature of practice that implies the present is temporally related to past practice and conditions (Bourdieu, 1990; Schatzki, 2012; Kemmis et al., 2014), which is conceptualised by Kemmis as practice architecture. Practice architectures encapsulate the history of the happenings of the practice and act as a kind of collective 'memory' that enable or constrain current practices (Kemmis et al., 2014, 31).

The subsequent literature review uncovered the structuring forces of policies dating back to the formation of the state in 1922 that frame practice in the present. In particular the control the Church assumed and maintained in Irish political, social and family life contributed to an uncritical and consensual attitude in Irish society in general (Inglis, 1998; Lynch et al., 2012; O'Sullivan, 2005) and in primary schools especially (Norman, 2003; Irwin, 2015). The state/ Church nexus contributed to the unique context in Ireland where 96% of schools are denominationally managed. It could be argued that the paternalistic nature of denominational control of primary schools may have had a significant influence on primary teachers' subjectivity and goes some way to explain the traditional reluctance of primary school teachers to challenge the status quo in Catholic schools (Norman, 2003). Secondly, economic policies of the state from the 1960s onwards focussed educational purposes on the economic needs of the state framed within a human capital theory (Walsh, 2014;

O'Sullivan, 2005). The literature review tracked the rise in participation in secondary and tertiary education of children of the farming community in particular and the widening participation gap between poorer farming and urban working class families (Tovey and Share, 2003). The third point is connected with this increased access to education which embedded a meritocratic ideology in Irish society (Kennedy and Power, 2010; Drudy, 2009; Lynch et al., 2012). Literature suggests that ideologies of meritocracy and achievement normalise and justify social inequality, by placing the onus for success or failure squarely in the hands of the individual, which detracts from larger structural forces that ensure that some people are destined to succeed while others are destined to fail (Bourdieu, 1993; Kincheloe, 2003; Kress, 2012). It is argued that these factors: a deep-rooted consensualism, aligned with a new meritocratic individualism set within the human capital framework of Irish education provided a fertile ground in which to breed neoliberal policies from the 1990s onwards (Lynch et al., 2012, 10). Currently neoliberal inspired policy frames practice in primary schools. The three features of the global education reform movement (Sahlberg, 2007), are evident in recent DES policies (DES, 2011; DES, 2017). As teachers engage in practice to meet the targets set, focus on improving literacy and numeracy standards or face the consequential accountability systems (Sahlberg, 2007), O'Sullivan (2005) reminds us that the set of policy prescriptions, originated in Catholic social teaching and human capital theory from the previous eras, live on in the consensual and meritocratic attitudes common in Irish education.

Reading the history of Irish education as it related to my subjective understanding of practice through the lens of habitus made more visible the cultural milieu which was part of the taken-for-granted aspects of my life as a child and later as a teacher. I recognised the palpable traces of policies of past eras which maintain the dominant hegemony in current teaching practice. The Irish language requirement for entry to ITE that acts as a barrier to diversity in the primary teaching profession (Gilligan, 2007), is an example, as is the culture of silence among primary teachers who work in Catholic managed schools (Norman, 2003; Irwin, 2015) but who are equally accountable to state rules. I realised that my prior reflexive stance (Archer, 2003) had evolved in relation to that culture, to the extent that it was confluent and compatible with a culture that represented my reality. Moreover I recognised that the themes of certainty of beliefs and continuity of perspectives that had emerged in second-person

inquiry aligned with the dominant hegemonic position in Irish education forged in consensualism and meritocratic individualism set within the human capital framework.

Practice architecture (Kemmis et al., 2014) captures the history of happenings of a practice but does not do justice to the interrelated mesh of historical, political, socio-economic, denominational and ideological issues that frame practice in some Irish primary schools. Cultural architecture is suggested in this thesis as a more appropriate concept to encapsulate the messy, incoherent nature of policy embedded in a history of previous policies (Ball, 2003) which has framed current practice. The construction of the concept of cultural architecture makes it possible to identify how disadvantaged education came to be perceived as a cultural object in Irish education discourse. Its maintenance is apparent in its juxtaposition with the meritocratic and consensual perspectives cultivated and maintained within the originally compatible, but increasingly dichotomous Church/State control of education. In an exploration of educational disadvantage this thesis has revealed how its uncontested 'taken-for-granted' acceptance reflects on cultural aspects of Irish education that normally escape identification and naming.

In what way does this research contribute to knowledge?

To consider the usefulness of this inquiry it is necessary to consider how knowledge, practice and research are related. “The term research is used to refer to any systematic, critical or self-critical inquiry which aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge” (Pring, 2004, 7). Questions about the nature and constituents of knowledge are transcendent of time and place. McNiff (2002) outlines three main kinds of knowledge: propositional (know that), practical (know how) and personal knowledge. Propositional knowledge, also called technical rational knowledge is an abstract body of knowledge, external to the knower. It is supported by evidence. Practical knowledge, also called procedural knowledge refers to procedures and capabilities and is supported by demonstration of the knowledge or skill. Personal or tacit knowledge refers to a subjective way of knowing that often cannot be articulated (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002, 28). I suggest it relates to the knowledge we acquire through habitus. Others emphasise experiential knowledge (Heron, 1996; Reason and Torbert, 2001; Coghlan ,2016), "evident only in actually

meeting and feeling the presence of some energy, entity, person, place, process or thing"(Heron, 1996, 33). While it is apparent that there are different forms of knowledge and different ways of knowing that are related to views of reality, it is also apparent that different forms of knowledge are valued differently in different contexts.

Propositional knowledge that refers to abstract ways of knowing views reality as external to the knower; has traditionally been favoured by the Western Academia (Coghlan, 2016; McNiff and Whitehead, 2002; Reason and Torbert, 2001). Relational knowledge or dialectical logic on the other hand that views the knower as part of reality emphasises the value and usefulness of practical knowledge (Reason & Bradbury, 2013; Dohn, 2014; Coghlan, 2016) to practitioners. Those who work to promote the acceptance of practical knowledge within the academy reference Jurgen Habermas' theory of knowledge-constitutive interest developed in the 1970s as pivotal to understanding how and why forms of knowledge are valued differently (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002; Carr and Kemmis, 1986).

Habermas rejects the view that knowledge generation is neutral activity. According to Habermas knowledge is the outcome of human activity that is motivated by natural needs and interests which he categorised in terms of three broad sets of interests: the technical, the practical and the emancipatory. Habermas contends that technical interest relates to the desire of human beings in acquiring knowledge that will facilitate their technical control over natural objects. It has produced much of the knowledge necessary for modern industrial and technological progress. Therefore he does not denigrate technical knowledge but rejects any claim that it is the only type of legitimate knowledge. The practical interest relates to human interest in understanding social life. It generates knowledge in the form of interpretive understanding which can inform and guide practical judgement. Habermas cautions that interpretive approaches cannot provide an adequate understanding of the subjective meanings of people as subjectivity is conditioned by the objective context which is perceived to either enable or constrain one's perspective of possibilities. In other words interpretive approaches that exclude critically questioning the evolution of understanding within prevailing social, cultural, political or historical conditions is not sufficient. The emancipatory interest requires a critical exploration of the objective framework within which one is subjectively situated.

> Critical theory, then, is not critical simply in the sense of voicing disapproval of contemporary social arrangements, but in the sense that it attempts to distil the historical processes which have caused subjective meanings to become systematically distorted.
>
> (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, 137)

In action research knowledge is considered multi-dimensional with an extended epistemology which rests on the logic that propositional knowledge is interdependent with other kinds of knowledge (Heron, 1996, 33). Heron suggests that authentic practical knowledge gained tacitly or through experience, recognised in cultural and aesthetic forms which incorporates and demonstrates an understanding of propositional knowledge leads to the development of multi-dimensional knowledge relevant to and sufficient for practice. Action Research starts with everyday experience and is concerned with the development of living knowledge (Coghlan 2016,88). Reason and Bradbury emphasise that the process of starting with everyday experience in the development of living theory is in many ways as important as the specific outcomes of that process (Reason and Bradbury, 2013).

Personal learning contributes to Actionable Knowledge

At the start of this research process I was unable to articulate the source of the contradiction I experienced in practice. Action Research as an approach allowed for the research process to start with my tacit knowledge and gradually develop through engagement with theory and experience. The theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu scaffolded the process. It is argued that Bourdieu's concepts are over-used and cherry-picked to provide the cover of theoretical gravity in social research (Stahl, 2016; Desan, 2013). On the other hand their malleability facilitates their application to multiple situations (Murphy and Costa, 2016). In agreement with the latter view I found that the reflexive use of the concepts on my tacit and experiential knowledge opened a route to critical awareness of the limits of my practical understanding. Reflexively relating my prior understandings through the lens of theory was difficult as I began to see what could not previously be perceived and at the same time empowering as it opened the possibility for more informed understanding with prefigurative potential for future practice.

This thesis has the potential to speak more broadly to others involved in Irish primary education. It underlines the importance of understanding the ecological

nature of practice and the architecture that informs subjectivity. The Teaching Council, as the professional standards body for teaching in Ireland, explicitly recommends that teachers take personal responsibility for sustaining and improving the quality of their professional practice by reflecting on and critically evaluating their practice (Teaching Council, 2016, 8). This thesis embodies that recommendation. Its potential for practising teachers is of a vicarious and hopefully encouraging nature.

On a personal level the process enabled me to articulate the contradiction I experienced. My tacit ontological view that as a practitioner I affect the reality in Oakwood PS by my actions was constrained by my underdeveloped critical awareness of the structuring forces of historical cultural conditions on my epistemological views. As Stronach observes, views of knowledge I did not understand held me in the contradiction (Stronach, 2010, 184). The process has been educative for me, and has enabled a reflexive understanding that continues to evolve. Moreover, naming the process of coming to reflexive understanding as an equal finding to my conceptualisation of cultural architecture in this research contributes to actionable knowledge. I hope it encourages others to engage in the process of exploring their understanding of their practice.

References

Agostinone-Wilson, F. (2013) *Dialectical Research Methods in the Classical Marxist Tradition*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Alexander, R.J. (2010) Research, the Cambridge Primary Review and the quality of education. In: R. J. Alexander & C. Doddington (eds.) *The Cambridge Primary Review Surveys*. Oxon: Routledge, 857.

Ali-Khan, C. and Siry, C. (2014) Sharing seeing: Exploring photo-elicitation with children in two different cultural contexts. *Teacher and Teacher Education*, 37, 194–207.

Allen, G. (2011) *Intertextuality (The New Critical Idiom)*, 2nd edition. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Allen, J. (2002) PhOLKS Lore: Learning from Photographs, Families and Children. *Language Arts*, 79(4) 312–322. Available from: www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Journals/LA/0794-mar02/LA0794Pholks.pdf [accessed on 12 July 2013].

Allen, K. (2000) *The Celtic Tiger? The Myth of Social Partnership in Ireland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Amsler, S. (2015) *The Education of Radical Democracy*. Oxon: Routledge.

Anderson, G.L., Herr, K. and Nihlen, A.S. (2007) *Studying Your own School: An Educator's Guide to Practitioner Action Research*, 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.

Anderson, J.A. (2005) *Accountability in Education*. Jointly published by The International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), Paris, and the International Academy of Education (IAE), Brussels. Available from: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001409/140986e.pdf.

Aoki, T.T. (1993) Legitimating Lived Curriculum: Towards a Curricular Landscape of Multiplicity. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 8(3) 255–268.

Apple, M.W. (2004) Creating Difference: Neo-Liberalism, Neo-Conservatism and the Politics of Educational Reform. *Educational Policy*, 18(1)12–44.

Archer, M.S. (2003) *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Archer, M.S. (2007) *Making Our Way through the World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Arendt, H. (1998) *The Human Condition*, 2nd edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ball, S.J. (2003a) *Class Strategies and the Education Market: The Middle Classes and Social Advantage*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Ball, S.J. (2003b) The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(2) 215–228.

Ball, S.J. (2006) *Education Policy and Social Class: The selected works of Stephen J. Ball*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Ball, S.J. (2015a) Accounting for a sociological life: influences and experiences on the road from welfarism to neoliberalism. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 36(6) 817–831.

Ball, S.J. (2015b) Subjectivity as a site of struggle: refusing neoliberalism? *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Published online 16 June 2015. 37(8) 1129-1146.

Ball, S.J. (2016) Neoliberal education? Confronting the slouching beast. *Policy Futures in Education*, 14(8) 1046–1059.

Biesta, G. (2009) Good education in an age of measurement: on the need to reconnect with the question of purpose in education. *Educational Assessment Evaluation and Accountability*, 21 (1) 33–46.

Biesta, G. (2013) Knowledge, judgement and the curriculum: on the past, present and future of the idea of the Practical. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 45(5) 684–696.

Biesta, G. (2015) What is education for? On Good education, teacher judgement, and educational professionalism. *European Journal of Education*, 50(1) 75-87.

Boler, M. (2004) Teaching for Hope: The Ethics of Shattering World Views. In: D. Liston and J. Garrison (eds.) *Teaching, Learning, and Loving: Reclaiming Passion in Educational Practice*. New York: Routledge, 117–136.

Bonefeld, W. (2012) Freedom and the Strong State: On German Ordoliberalism. *New Political Economy*, 17(5), 633–656.

Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1988) *Homo Academicus*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The Logic of Practice*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power*. London: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1993) *Sociology in Question*. London: Sage Publications.

Bourdieu, P. (2008) *Sketch for a self-analysis*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.C. (1990) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, 2nd edition. London: Sage Publications.

Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L.J. (1992) *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Breen, R. (2010) Social Mobility and Equality of Opportunity. Geary Lecture Spring 2010. *The Economic and Social Review*, 41(4) 413–428.

Breen, R., Hannan, D.F., Rottman, David B. and Whelan, C.T. (1990) *Understanding Contemporary Ireland: State, Class and Development in the Republic of Ireland*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2014) *Research and the Teaching Profession. Building the capacity for a self-improving education system.*

Final Report of the BERA-RSA inquiry into the role of Research in Teacher Education. [online] Available from: www.bera.ac.uk/project/research-and-teacher-education [Accessed 18 October 2017].

Brookfield, S.D. (1995) *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Brydon Miller, M. and Coghlan, D. (2018) First-, second- and third-person values-based ethics in educational action research: personal resonance, mutual regard and social responsibility. *Educational Action Research*, Published online. Available from: https://library.lincoln.ac.uk/items/eds/edselc/edselc.2-52.0-85043698908 [accessed 8 April 2018].

Bryman, A. (2012) *Social Research Methods*, 4th edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bullough, R. V and Pinnegar, S. (2001) Guidelines for Quality in Autographical Forms of Self-Study Research. *Educational Researcher*, 30(3) 13–21.

Burns, G. (2016) Relationships of surveillance, assurance and recognition: early career primary teachers' engagement with discourses of accountability and performance. *Irish Educational Studies*, 35 (3) 269-289.

Card, J. (2012) Talking pictures: Exploiting the potential of visual sources to generate productive pupil talk. *Teaching History*, 148 (September) 40–45.

Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. (1986) *Becoming Critical: Education, knowledge and action research*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Clarke, S. (2004) The Neoliberal Theory of Society. In: A. Saad-Filho and D. Johnston (eds.) *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader*. London: Pluto Press, 50-59.

Coghlan, D. (2016) Retrieving a philosophy of practical knowing for Action Research. *International Journal of Action Research*, 12 (1) 84–107.

Coghlan, D. and Brannick, T. (2014) *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organisation*, 4th edition. London: Sage Publications.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2011) *Research Methods in Education*, 7th edition. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (2009) Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, Dublin. Available from: www.childabusecommission.ie/rpt/pdfs/ [accessed 18 July 2017].

Conaty, C. (2002) *Including All*. Dublin: Veritas.

Conboy, S. (2017) *What are Community National Schools?* Education and Training Boards Ireland, 3–4. Available from: www.etbi.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ETBI_Spring_web.pdf [accessed 5 August 2017].

Connell, R. (2013) The neoliberal cascade and education: an essay on the market agenda and its consequences. *Critical Studies in Education*, 54(2) 99–112.

Conway, P.F. (2013) Cultural Flashpoint: The Politics of Teacher Education Reform in Ireland. *The Educational Forum*, 77(1) 51–72.

Conway, P.F. and Murphy, R. (2013) A rising tide meets a perfect storm: new accountabilities in teaching and teacher education in Ireland. *Irish Educational Studies*, 32(1), 11–36.

Conway, P.F., Murphy, R., Rath, A. and Hall, K. (2009) *Learning to teach and its implication for the continuum of teacher education: A nine-country cross national study*. Report commissioned by the Teaching Council, Maynooth, Ireland. Available from: www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/Publications/Research/Documents/Learning-to-Teach-and-its-Implications-for-the-Continuum-of-Teacher-Education.pdf.

Coolahan, J. (1981) *Irish Education: Its History and Structure*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

Coolahan, J. (2003) Attracting, *Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers. Country background Report for Ireland*. Report prepared by Department of Education and Science for OECD. Available from: www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Attracting-Developing-and-Training-Effective-Teachers-OECD-Country-Background-Report-for-Ireland.pdf

Coolahan, J. (2011) Address for the Launch of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector. Available from: www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Events/Patronage-and-Pluralism-in-the-Primary-Sector/19-April-2011-Address-by-Professor-Coolahan-Chair-Forum-Advisory-Group-at-the-launch-of-the-Forum.pdf [accessed 26 July 2017].

Coolahan, J., Drudy, S., Hogan, P., Hyland, A. and McGuinness, S. (2017) *Towards a Better Future: A Review of the Irish School System*. Dublin: Irish Primary Principals' Network and National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals. Available from: www.researchgate.net/publication/315769287_Towards_a_Better_Future_A_Review_of_the_Irish_School_System.

Coolahan, J., Hussey, C. and Kilfeather, F. (2012) *The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector. Report on the Forum's Advisory Group*. Dublin.

Cregan, Á. (2008) From Difference to Disadvantage: 'Talking Posh' Sociolinguistic perspectives on the context of schooling in Ireland. Dublin. Available from: www.combatpoverty.ie/publications/workingpapers/2007-03_WP_TalkingPosh.pdf.

Daly, E. (2009) Religious freedom as a function of power relations: dubious claims on pluralism in the denominational schools debate. *Irish Educational Studies*, 28(3), 235–251.

Darmody, M. and Smyth, E. (2016) *Entry to Programmes of Initial Teacher Education*. Dublin. Available at: www.esri.ie.

Davies, W. (2014) A Bibliographic Review of Neoliberalism. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 31 (7/8) 309-317. Available from www.theoryculturesociety.org/william-davies-a-bibliographic-review-of-neoliberalism/ [Accessed 5 August 2018]

Davies, W. (2015) The *Limits of Neoliberalism: Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Competition*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Deegan, J., Devine, D. and Lodge, A. (2004) *Primary Voices. Equality, Diversity and Childhood in Irish Primary Schools*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

Delaney, S. (2017) *Become the Primary Teacher Everyone Wants to Have: A Guide to Career Success*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Department of Education (1936) *Report of the Department of Education 1935-36*. Dublin. Available at: https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Statistical-Report-1935-1936.pdf.

Department of Education and Skills (DES) (1999) *The Primary School Curriculum*. Dublin. Available from https://curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/93de2707-f25e-4bee-9035-92b00613492e/Introduction-to-primary-curriculum.pdf.

Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2005) *DEIS Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools: An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion*. Dublin: DES

Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2011) *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life. The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020*. Dublin: DES

Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2016) *Primary Language Curriculum*. Dublin: DES

Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2017) *Circular 63/2017 Leadership and Management in Primary Schools*. Available from https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0063_2017.pdf

Desan, M. (2013) Bourdieu's legacy. *Thesis Eleven*, 117(1), 135–143.

Devine, D. (2005) Welcome to the Celtic Tiger? Teacher responses to immigration and increasing ethnic diversity in Irish schools. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 15(1), 49–70.

Devine, D., Fahie, D. and McGillicuddy, D. (2013) What is 'good teaching'? Teacher beliefs and practices about their teaching. *Irish Educational Studies*, 32(1), 83–108.

Dewey, J. (1916) *Democracy and Education*, 2011 edition. Hollywood, USA: Simon and Brown.

Dick, B. (1993) You want to do an action research thesis? Available from: www.aral.com.au/resources/arthesis.html.

Dohn, N. (2014) On the necessity of intertwining 'knowledge in practice' in action research. *International Journal of Action Research*, 10(1), 54–97.

Drudy, S. (1991) Developments in Sociology of Education in Ireland 1966-91. *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 1(1), 107–127.

Drudy, S. (ed.) (2009) *Education in Ireland. Challenge and Change*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd.

Drudy, S. and Lynch, K. (1993) *Schools and Society in Ireland*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.

Drudy, S., Martin, M., Woods, M. and O'Flynn, J. (2005) *Men and the Classroom: Gender imbalances in teaching*. London: Routledge.

Educational Disadvantage Committee (2005) *Moving Beyond Educational Disadvantage. Report of the Educational Disadvantage Committee 2002-2005*.

Dublin: Educational Disadvantage Committee.

Edwards-Groves, C. and Kemmis, S. (2015) Pedagogy, Education and Praxis: understanding new forms of intersubjectivity through action research and practice theory. *Educational Action Research*, (November), 1–20. Available from: www.scopus.com/inward/record.url?eid=2-s2.0-84940704147&partnerID=tZOtx3y1.

Elliott, J. (1998) *The Curriculum Experiment: Meeting the challenge of social change*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Elliott, J. (2015) Educational action research as the quest for virtue in teaching. *Educational Action Research*, 23(1), 4–21.

European Commission (1957) *Treaty of Rome*. Available from: https://ec.europa.eu/romania/sites/romania/files/tratatul_de_la_roma.pdf [Accessed 10 August 2018]

Fives, H. and Buehl, M.M. (2008) What do teachers believe? Developing a framework for examining beliefs about teachers' knowledge and ability. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 33(2), 134–176.

Flynn, S. (2010) Shattering the myth of a world-class education system. *Irish Times*, 8 December. Available from http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/shattering-the-myth-of-a-world-class-education-system-1.686049. [accessed 23 July 2012]

Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin.

Freire, P. (1974) *Education for Critical Consciousness*. London: Bloomsbury.

Freire, P. (1992) *Pedagogy of Hope. Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Bloomsbury.

Freire, P. (1998) *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to those who dare to teach*. Colorado: Westview Press.

Gall, J., Gall, M.D. and Borg, W.R. (2014) *Applying Educational Research: How to Read, Do and Use Research to Solve Problems of Practice*. Essex: Pearson Education.

Gilligan, A.L. (2007) The Dilemma of Difference. In: P. Downes and A.L. Gilligan (eds) *Beyond Educational Disadvantage*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 39-46.

Giroux, H. (2008) Education and the Crisis of Youth: Schooling and the Promise of Democracy. *The Education Forum*, 73(1), 8–18. Available from: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131720802539523.

Gleeson, J. (2009) *Curriculum in Context: Partnership, Power and Praxis in Ireland*. Oxford: Peter Lang.

Goodson, I. (1995) *The making of the Curriculum: Collected Essays*, 2nd edition. Abingdon, Oxon: RoutledgeFalmer.

Government of Ireland (1937) *Constitution of Ireland*. Available from: www.irishstatutebook.ie/en/constitution/.

Government of Ireland (1997) *Public Service Management Act, 1997*. Dublin: Stationery Office. Available from: www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1997/act/27/enacted/en/html.

Government of Ireland (1998a) *The Education Act*. Dublin: Stationery Office. Available from: www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1998/act/51/enacted/en/html.

Government of Ireland (1998b) *Employment Equality Act*. Dublin: Stationery Office. Available from: www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1998/act/21/enacted/en/pdf.

Government of Ireland (2012) *Education (Amendment) Bill*. Dublin: Stationery Office. Available from: www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills28/bills/2012/0112/document1.pdf.

Grace, G. (1995) *School Leadership: Beyond Education Management. An Essay in Policy Scholarship*. London: Falmer Press.

Gray, J. and O'Carroll, A. (2012) Education and class formation in 20th century Ireland: a retrospective qualitative longitudinal analysis. *Sociology*, 46(4), 696–711.

Groundwater-Smith, S. and Mockler, N. (2007) Ethics in practitioner research: an issue of quality. *Research Papers in Education*, 22(2), 199–211.

Hage, G. (2013) Eavesdropping on Bourdieu's Philosophers. *Thesis Eleven*, 114(1), 76–93.

Hamilton, D. (2013) *Towards a Theory of Schooling*, 2nd edition. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Hammersley, M. (2017) Interview data: a qualified defence against the radical critique. *Qualitative Research*, 17(2), 173–186.

Hammersley, M. and Traianou, A. (2014) Ethics and Educational Research. *British Educational Research Association Annual*. Available from: www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/ethics-and-educational-research.

Harper, D. (1998) An argument for visual sociology. In: J. Prosser (ed.) *Image-based Research: A sourcebook for qualitative researchers*. London: Falmer Press, 20–35.

Harper, D. (2002) Talking about pictures: a case for photo elicitation. *Visual Studies*, 17(1), 13–26.

Haase, T. and Pratschke, J. (2017) *The 2016 Pobal HP Deprivation Index*. Available from http://trutzhaase.eu/deprivation-index/the-2016-pobal-hp-deprivation-index-for-small-areas/ [accessed 17 May 2018].

Heron, J. (1996) *Co-operative Inquiry. Research into the Human Condition*. London: Sage Publications.

Herr, K. and Anderson, G.L. (2005) *The Action Research Dissertation: A Guide for Students and Faculty*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Hyland, Á. (1996) Multi Denominational Schools in the Republic of Ireland 1975-1995. Paper presented at a Conference Education and Religion organised by

C.R.E.L.A. at the University of Nice. 21-22 June 1996. Available from: www.educatetogether.ie/sites/default/files/multi-denominational_schools_in_the_republic_of_ireland_1975-1995_by_aine_hyland.pdf.

Inglis, T. (1998) *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.

Irish Episcopal Conference (2015) *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*. Dublin: Veritas.

Irwin, J. (2015) A Complex Pluralism – Rights and Dilemmas in the Community National School Context. *The Irish Community Law Journal*, 4(2), 47–57.

Jenks, C. (2005) *Culture*, 2nd edition. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Kavanagh, J. (1956) *Manual of Social Ethics*. Dublin: Gill. Available from: https://lxoa.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/manualofsocialethics.pdf.

Kellaghan, T. (2002) Approaches to problems of Educational Disadvantage. In: *Primary Education: Ending Disadvantage. Proceeding and Action Plan of National Forum 1- 5 July 2002*. Dublin: St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, 17–30.

Kelly, A.V. (2009) *The Curriculum: Theory and Practice*, 6th edition. London: Sage Publications.

Kemmis, S. (2006) Participatory action research and the public sphere. *Educational Action Research*, 14(4), 459–476.

Kemmis, S. (2010) What is to be done? The place of action research. *Educational Action Research*, 18(4), 417–427.

Kemmis, S. (2013) Critical Theory and Participatory Action Research. In: P. Reason and H. Bradbury (eds.) *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*. London: Sage Publications, 121–138.

Kemmis, S., Wilkinson, J., Edwards-Groves, C., Hardy, I., Grootenboer, P. and Bristol, L. (2014) *Changing Practices, Changing Education*. Singapore: Springer.

Kennedy, A. (2005) Models of Continuing Professional Development: a framework for analysis. *Journal of In-service Education*, 31(2), 235–250.

Kennedy, E. (2013) Literacy Policy in Ireland. *European Journal of Education*, 48(4), 511–527.

Kennedy, E. (1970) *Reformatory and Industrial Schools Systems Report (The Kennedy Report)*. Dublin. Available from: www.lenus.ie/hse/bitstream/10147/77793/5/Reformatory%26IndusSchoolSys.pdf.

Kennedy, M. and Power, M. (2010) "The smokescreen of meritocracy": Elite Education in Ireland and the Reproduction of Class Privilege. *The Journal For Critical Education Policy Studies*, 8(2), 223–247.

Kincheloe, J. (2003) *Teachers as Researchers: Qualitative Inquiry as a Path to Empowerment*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

King, F. (2012) Developing *and Sustaining Teachers' Professional Learning: A*

Case Study of Collaborative Professional Development. University of Lincoln: Unpublished EdD.

Kitching, K. (2010) An excavation of the racialised politics of viability underpinning education policy in Ireland. *Irish Educational Studies*, 29(3), 213–229.

Klocker, N. (2012) Doing participatory action research and doing a PhD: words of encouragement for prospective students. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 36(1), 149–163.

Kneyber, R. (2016) On Neoliberalism and How It Travels. Interview with Stephen Ball. In: R. Evers and J. Kneyber (eds.) *Flip the System. Changing Education from the Ground Up*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 38–44.

Kress, T. (2012) *Critical Praxis Research: Breathing New Life into Research Methods for Teachers*. Dordrecht: Springer. Available from: www-dawsonera-com.proxy.library.lincoln.ac.uk/abstract/9789400717909

Kvale, S. (2006) Dominance Through Interviews and Dialogues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(3), 480–500.

Lareau, A. (2003) *Unequal Childhoods. Class, Race and Family Life*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Larrivee, B. (2000) Transforming Teaching Practice: Becoming the critically reflective teacher. *Reflective Practice*, 1(3), 293–307.

Lawler, S. (2005) Introduction: Class, Culture and Identity. *Sociology*, 39(5), 797–806.

Lawrence, A. (2009) Problematizing neighorhood renewal: community, effectiveness and disadvantage. *Critical Studies in Education*, 50(1), 37–50.

Leavy, A. (2005) 'When I meet them I talk to them': the challenges of diversity for preservice teacher education. *Irish Educational Studies*, 24(2–3), 159–177.

Looney, A. (2014) Curriculum politics and practice: from “implementation” to agency. *Irish Teachers’ Journal*, 2(1), 7–14.

Lopez, A.E. (2014) Re-conceptualising Teacher Leadership Through Curriculum Inquiry in Pursuit of Social Justice: A Case Study from the Canadian Context. In: I. Bogotch and C. M. Shields (eds.) *International Handbook of Educational and Social (in)Justice*. Dordrecht: Springer, 465–484.

Lortie, D.C. (2002) *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study*, 2nd edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Loxley, A., Johnston, K., Murchan, D., Fitzgerald, H. and Quinn, M. (2007) The role of whole-school contexts in shaping the experiences and outcomes associated with professional development. *Journal of Inservice Education*, 33(3), 265–285.

Loxley, A., Seery, A. and Walsh, J. (2014) Investment in Education and the tests of time. *Irish Educational Studies*, 33(2), 173–191.

Lynch, K., Grummell, B. and Devine, D. (2012) *New Managerialism in Education: Commercialization, Carelessness and Gender*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mac Gréil, M. (2011) *Pluralism and Diversity in Ireland: Prejudice and Related Issues in Early 21st Century Ireland*. Dublin: Columba Press.

Mac Ruairc, G. (2009a) "Dip, dip, blue, who's it? NOT YOU": children's experiences of standardised testing: a socio-cultural analysis. *Irish Educational Studies*, 28(1), 47-66.

Mac Ruairc, G. (2009b) Language, socio-economic class and educational underachievement. In: S. Drudy (ed.) *Education in Ireland: Challenge and Change*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 118-135.

Magrini, J.M. (2015) Phenomenology and curriculum implementation: discerning a living curriculum through the analysis of Ted Aoki's situational praxis. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 47(2), 274–299.

McCoy, S., Quail, A. and Smyth, E. (2014) The effects of school social mix: unpacking the differences. *Irish Educational Studies*, 33(3), 307–330.

McElduff, A. and Sheehan, B. (2001) The Education Act 1998 and The Education Welfare Act 2000. Questions and Answers Guide. Dublin: Irish National Teachers Organisation.

McGuire, P. (2014) CAO Points up or static for most courses. *Irish Times*, 18 August. Available from http://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/cao-points-up-or-static-for-most-courses-1.1899616?page=3.

McNamee, S. (2018) *The Meritocracy Myth*, 4th edition. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group.

McNiff, J. (2002) *Action research for professional development. Concise advice for new action researchers*, 3rd edition. Dorset: September Books. Available from: www.septemberbooks.com.

McNiff, J. and Whitehead, J. (2002) *Action Research: Principles and Practice*, 2nd edition. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Menter, I. (2008) Tradition, culture and identity in the reform of teachers' work in Scotland and England: some methodological considerations. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 16(1), 57–69.

Meyer, J.H.F. and Land, R. (eds.) (2006) *Overcoming Barriers to Student Understanding. Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Mezirow, J. (1991) *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miles, M.B. and Huberman, M.A. (1994) *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Mills, C. and Gale, T. (2007) Researching social inequalities in education: Towards a Bourdieuian methodology. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 20(4), 433–447.

Moll, L.C. and Arnot-Hopffer, E. (2005) Sociocultural competence in Teacher Education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, May/ June (56), 242–247.

Monbiot, G. (2016) Neoliberalism - the ideology at the root of all our problems. *The Guardian*, 15 April Available from: www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot.

Morgan, M., Ludlow, L., Kitching, K., O'Leary, M., and Clarke, A. (2010) What makes teachers tick? Sustaining events in new teachers' lives. *British Educational Research Journal*, 36(2), 191–208.

Morrison, M. (2007) What do we mean by educational research? In: A. Briggs and M. Coleman (eds.) *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management*. London: Sage Publications, 13–36.

Murchan, D., Loxley, A., Johnston, K., Quinn, M. and Fitzgerald, H. (2005) *Evaluation of the Primary Curriculum Support Programme* (PCSP). Dublin: University of Dublin.

Murphy, M. and Costa, C. (eds.) (2016) *Theory as Method in Research: On Bourdieu, Social Theory and Education*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2010) *Curriculum Overload in Primary Schools. An overview of national and international experiences*. Available from: www.ncca.ie/media/2052/curriculum_overload_in_primary_schools_an_overview_of_national_and_international_experiences.pdf

Norman, J. (2003) *Ethos and Education in Ireland*. New York: Peter Lang.

O'Hara, P. (1998) *Partners in Production? Women, Farm and Family in Ireland.* New York: Berghahn Books.

O'Sullivan, D. (2005) *Cultural Politics and Irish Education since 1950. Paradigms and Power*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

O'Toole, B. (2015) 1831–2014: an opportunity to get it right this time? Some thoughts on the current debate on patronage and religious education in Irish primary schools. *Irish Educational Studies*, 34(1), 89–102.

O'Toole, F. (2017) State of Us: Ireland's story doesn't make sense any more. *Irish Times*, 19 August. Available from: www.irishtimes.com/opinion/state-of-us-ireland-s-story-doesn-t-make-sense-any-more-1.3186301.

O Higgins-Norman, J. (2011) Sociology of Education. In: B. Walsh (ed.) *Education Studies in Ireland. Key Disciplines*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 107–125.

Olson, S. (2012) Celebrating an Aokian Experience: A Curriculum Scholar Review. [Online] Available from http://www.curriculumtheoryproject.ca/2012/03/celebrating-an-aokian-experience-a-curriculum-scholar-review-for-edu-6102-by-sarah-olson/.

Pajares, M.F. (1992) Teachers' Beliefs and Educational Research: Cleaning Up a Messy Construct. *Review of Educational Research*, 62(3), 307–332.

Pillow, W.S. (2010) 'Dangerous Reflexivity' Rigour, Responsibility and Reflexivity in qualitative research. In: P. Thompson and M. Walker (eds.) *The Routledge Doctoral Student's Companion: Getting to grips with research in Education and the Social Sciences*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 270–282.

Pinar, W.F. (2012) *What is Curriculum Theory?*, 2nd edition. New York: Routledge.

Pinar, W.F. and Irwin, R.L. (eds.) (2005) *Curriculum in a New Key: The Collected Works of Ted T Aoki*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Routledge.

Polanyi, M. (1962) *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, 2nd edition. London: Routledge.

Priestly, M., Biesta, G. and Robinson, S. (2015) *Teacher Agency: An Ecological Approach*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Pring, R. (2004) *Philosophy of Educational Research*, 2nd edition. London: Continuum.

Raferty, D. (2009) The legacy of legislation and the pragmatics of policy: historical perspectives on schooling for Irish children. In: S. Drudy (ed.) *Education in Ireland: Challenge and Change*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 9–23.

Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. (eds.) (2013) *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*, 2nd edition. London: Sage Publications.

Reason, P. and Torbert, W.R. (2001) The action turn: Toward a transformational social science. *Concepts and Transformation*, 6(1), 1–37

Reay, D. (1998) *Class Work. Mothers' involvement in their Children's Primary Schooling*. London: University College London (UCL) Press.

Reay, D. (2004) "It's all becoming a habitus": beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25(4), 431-444.

Richardson, P.W., Karabenick, S.A. and Watt, H.M.G. (2014) *Teacher Motivation: Theory and Practice*. New York: Routledge.

Rizvi, F. and Lingard, B. (2010) *Globalizing Education Policy*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Robson, C. (2011) *Real World Research*, 3rd edition. Chichester: Wiley.

Rose, G. (2012) *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*, 3rd edition. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Roulston, K. (2010) Considering quality in qualitative interviewing. *Qualitative Research*, 10(2), 199-228.

Rowley, J. (2012) Conducting research interviews. *Management Research Review*, 35(2/3), 260-271.

Rubin, H.J. and Rubin, I.S. (2005) *Qualitative Interviewing. The Art of Hearing Data*, 2nd edition. London: Sage Publications.

Sachs, J. (2016) Teacher professionalism: why are we still talking about it? *Teachers and Teaching*, 22(4), 413–425. Available from: www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13540602.2015.1082732 [Accessed April 18, 2016].

Sahlberg, P. (2007) Education policies for raising student learning: the Finnish approach. *Journal of Education Policy*, 22(2), 147-171.

Saldana, J. (2016) *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 3rd edition. London: Sage Publications.

Savin-Baden, M. and Howell Major, C. (2013) *Qualitative Research. The essential guide to theory and practice*. Oxon: Routledge.

Schatzki, T.R. (2003) The New Societist Social Ontology. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 33(2), 174-2002.

Schatzki, T.R. (2012) A Primer on Practices. In: J. Higgs, R. Barett, S. Billet, M. Hutchings and F. Trede (eds.) *Practice-Based Education. Perspectives and Strategies*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 13-26.

Stahl, G. (2016) Doing Bourdieu justice: thinking with and beyond Bourdieu. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 37(7), 1091–1103.

Stake, R.E. (1986) An Evolutionary View of Program Improvement. In: E. R. House (ed.) *New Directions in Educational Evaluation*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 261.

Stigler, J.W. and Hiebert, J. (1999) *The Teaching Gap: Best Ideas from the World's Teachers for Improving Education in the Classroom*. New York: Free Press.

Stronach, I. (2010) *Globalizing Education, Educating the Local: How method made us mad*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Sullivan, B., Glenn, M., Roche, M. and McDonagh, C. (2016) *Introduction to Critical Reflection and Action for Teacher Researchers*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Swann, M., Peacock, A., Hart, S. and Drummond, M. J. (2012) *Creating Learning without Limits*. Berkshire: Open University Press.

Teaching Council of Ireland (2016) *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers*, 2nd edition. Available from: www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/Fitness-to-Teach/Code-of-Professional-Conduct/ [Accessed 28 November 2016]

Teaching Council of Ireland (2017) *Post-Qualification Professional Practice Procedures and Criteria 2017/18*. Available from: www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/Publications/Registration/Post-qualification-Professional-Practice-Procedures-and-Criteria-2017-2018.pdf [Accessed 17 January 2018].

Titchen, A. (2015) Action research: genesis, evolution and orientations. *International Practice Development Journal*, 5(1), 1-117.

Tovey, H. and Share, P. (2003) *A Sociology of Ireland*, 2nd edition. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.

Tyler, R.W. (2013) *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, revised edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Vähäsantanen, K. (2015) Professional agency in the stream of change: Understanding educational change and teachers' professional identities. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 47, 1-12.

Vähäsantanen, K. and Saarinen, J. (2012) The power dance in the research interview: manifesting power and powerlessness. *Qualitative Research*, 13(5), 493-510.

Vincent, C. and Maxwell, C. (2016) Parenting priorities and pressures: furthering understanding of 'concerted cultivation'. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 37(2), 269-281.

Wacquant, L.J. (1989) Towards a Reflexive Sociology. A Workshop with Pierre Bourdieu. *Sociological Theory*, 7(1), 26-63.

Walsh, B. (ed.) (2011) *Education Studies in Ireland: The Key Disciplines*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.

Walsh, J. (2014) Investment in Education and the intractability of inequality. *Irish Educational Studies*, 33(2), 121- 122.

Walsh, T. (2016) 100 years of primary curriculum development and implementation in Ireland: a tale of a swinging pendulum. *Irish Educational Studies*, 35(1) 1-16.

Watson, D., Kenny, O. and McGinnity, F. (2017) *A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland*. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute. Available from https://www.esri.ie/pubs/RS56.pdf [accessed 17 May 2017].

Weir, S. and Archer, P. (2004) *A review of school-based measures aimed at addressing educational disadvantage in Ireland. A Report to Educational Disadvantage Committee. Dublin: Educational Research Centre*. Available from: www.erc.ie/documents/edc_evaluations.pdf [Accessed 20 April 2014].

Weir, S., Archer, P., O'Flaherty, A and Gilleece, L. (2011) *A Report on the First Phase of the Evaluation of DEIS*. Dublin: Educational Research Centre

Wetherell, M. (2012) *Affect and emotion: A new social science understanding*. London: Sage.

Wilcox, S. (2009) Transformative educational development scholarship: beginning with ourselves. *International Journal of Academic Development*, 14(2), 123-132.

Wilcox, S., Watson, J. and Peterson, M. (2004) Self-study in Professional Practice. In: J.J. Loughran, M.L. Hamilton, V.K. LaBoskey and T.l. Russell (eds.) *International Handbook of Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices*, vol. 1. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 273-312.

Williams, K. (2010) 'Guilty Knowledge': The (im)possibility of ethical security in social science research. In: P. Thompson and M. Walker (eds.) *The Routledge Doctoral Student's Companion: Getting to grips with research in Education and the Social Sciences*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 256-269.

Winkle-Wagner, R. (2010) Revolutionary Possibilities? The Future of Cultural Capital in Educational Research. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 36(1), 91-111.

Zappone, K. (2002) *Achieving Equality in Children's Education. National Forum Primary Education: Ending Disadvantage*. Dublin: St Patrick's College.

Zappone, K. (2007) Towards a Living System of Education. In: P. Downes and A. L. Gilligan (eds.) *Beyond Educational Disadvantage*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 10-23.

Zyngier, D. (2011) (Re) conceptualising risk: left numb and unengaged and lost in a no-man's-land or what (seems to) work for at-risk students. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15(2), 211-231.

Appendix 1: Ethical Approval Form

EA2

Ethical Approval Form:

Human Research Projects

Please word-process this form. Handwritten applications will not be accepted.

This form must be completed for each piece of research activity conducted by academics, graduate students and undergraduates. The completed form must be approved by the CERD Research Ethics Committee.

Please complete all sections. If a section is not applicable, write N/A.

1 Name of researcher	Jean Mc Gowan Department/School: School of Education. College of Social Sciences.
2 Position in the University	EdD candidate in the School of Education.
3 Role in relation to this research	I will be the primary investigator on a pilot study to inform the research design and defence of my EdD thesis for fulfilment of the Doctorate in Educational Research and Development (assignment 4) and the subsequent research project informed by the pilot.
4 Brief statement of your main research question	To explore how a range of cultural influences and experiences impact on teachers' understanding and children's engagement with learning in one urban primary school, located in a low socio-economic disadvantaged area.
5 Brief description of the project	Aim The aim of this research is to ascertain how far the cultural understandings of teachers and children correspond in a primary school located in a low socio-economic disadvantaged urban area in Ireland. This aim arises from research carried out in the UK (Swann et al., 2012) which suggests that teacher exploration of children's beyond school influences can help to empower teaching staff to take action to increase children's capacity to learn, coupled with the findings of Cregan in 2006 which demonstrated a lack of knowledge and understanding of children's background and locality among teachers in disadvantaged schools in Ireland (Cregan, 2008).

Objectives

The principles on which the Primary School Curriculum are based state that the child's existing knowledge and experience should form the base for learning (NCCA, 1999), which assumes that teachers have access to the children's existing knowledge and experience.

1. This research intends to explore that assumption in this one particular school as there is ample evidence in the aforementioned research by Cregan to suggest that many teachers have difficulty understanding the lived experiences and knowledge of children who do not share similar cultural backgrounds to them, which makes curriculum implementation a more difficult task and creates a mismatch between teachers' and children's interpretations of learning activities.
2. If a gap in teachers' knowledge and understandings of the lived experiences of the children is detected, participatory action research is proposed as an effort of bridging it.

Rationale

For years concern has been expressed from a political, educational and social justice perspective for children from lower socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds, who have not benefitted from the Irish education system to the same extent as children from other socio-economic backgrounds (Zappone 2007; Cregan 2008; HEA, 2014). As the most recent data shows that the ratio of students progressing to tertiary education from low socio-economic disadvantaged areas compared with high socio-economic areas is less than 1:4 (HEA, 2014), it is apparent that the social justice objective is still not a reality for urban based people from low socio-economic disadvantaged areas. As I work as a principal teacher (head teacher) in a primary school located in a low socio-economic disadvantaged area I specifically want to explore the educational practice that takes place within the community of learners in our school and how traditional ways of teaching and learning, include or exclude other ways of knowing and being.

Research Questions

1.

i) To what extent do teachers' and children's cultural capitals connect?
ii) What forms of cultural capital are acknowledged and valued by the teachers?
iii) What are the personal and professional sources of the teachers' cultural capital?
iv) What forms of cultural capital appear to be valued by the children?

2.
i) How do teachers learn about children's cultural capital, (their lives, interests and concerns) in order to connect learning in school with the experiences and environments of the child as envisioned in The Primary School Curriculum?
ii) What factors appear to support or inhibit this learning?

3.
i) How can teaching be recontextualised and transformed so as to benefit DEIS Band 2 primary school children?
ii) How do senior teachers and teachers conceptualise their roles and pedagogies in this process?

Methodology
As this research relates to one school, it will form a case study.
The intention is to engage in participatory research (PR) with teachers in the school who agree to engage in the process. Belonging in the field of critical pedagogy, PR argues that educators must work with, and on, the lived experience that students bring to the pedagogical encounter rather than imposing a dominatory curriculum that reproduces social inequality. It facilitates research that has a practical intent. It straddles action research which 'can inform teachers about their practice and empower them to take leadership roles in their local teaching contexts' (Donato, 2003) and Critical Praxis Research (CPR) 'which requires scholar-practitioners to develop critical consciousness about who they are in relation to their students and the larger society in order to determine the best methods for conducting research that is fair, ethical and empowering for all stakeholders' (Kress, 2012:10). It is intended that this process will enable us to

articulate our views about our practice, how we can recontextualise teaching and learning for the pupils in our school and explore our socio-historical situation in relation to the system in which we operate.

The research will take place in a DEIS Band 2 school in an urban setting in Ireland, in which I am employed. All teachers in the school will be invited to participate in the research project. The number willing to participate cannot be anticipated until the invitation is issued, which will happen when ethical approval is granted. Out of the total of eight class teachers and three Special Education Needs teachers I hope that more than half of them will be willing to participate.

All teachers in the school will be asked if they wish to volunteer for the pilot. Should more than one volunteer, selection will be made by lottery, since the research is not intending to relate particular teachers or classes as variables to outcomes.

The pilot study will involve one participant teacher and will commence with an interview to ascertain the teacher's perspective on the cultural capital valued by him/her. The teacher will then be helped to establish a reflective diary or blog (whichever preferred by him/her) for use continually throughout the research to help capture his/her views, interpretations and understandings before, during and after the practical element of the research. This will be followed by a concluding interview to discuss the outcomes.

The practical aspect of the process will involve the teacher using photographs taken by the children as a stimulus for investigating and connecting different cultural capitals. It has been suggested that photo elicitation in research be regarded as a postmodern dialogue based on the authority of the subject rather than the researcher (Harper, 2002). In a school setting that could translate as a dialogue stimulated on the knowledge of the pupil rather than the teacher. The teacher, as a participant researcher will be invited to develop the approach in ways he/she feels would suit his/her class.

A report will be written based on the analysis of the evidence gathered during the pilot. I will compile an ongoing reflective commentary whereby I will assess the suitability of the methodology and will reflect on any changes that need to be made to the research design ahead

	of the defence of the research. At this stage, prior to the pilot study, it is difficult to anticipate what changes will be required for the whole research project, but it is intended to engage all the teachers who are willing to participate in the research in the same process. Should the pilot suggest that major changes are required, additional ethical approval for those changes will be sought.
	Approximate start date: November 2014 **Anticipated end date:** February 2015
6 Name and contact details of the Principal Investigator (if not you) or supervisor (if a student)	Professor Angela Thody **Email address:** athody@lincoln.ac.uk **Telephone:** 01522886071
7 Names of other researchers or student investigators involved	1. The participating colleagues from the school in which I work.
8 Location(s) at which this project is to be carried out	The pilot study will be carried out in the school in question, mainly in the participating teacher's classroom. The interviews will take place in the teacher's room of choice.
9 Statement of the ethical issues involved and how they are to be addressed, including discussion of the potential risks of harm to both project participants and researchers **This should include:** • **an assessment of the vulnerability of the participants and researchers** • **the manner and extent to which the research might not honour principles of respect, beneficence and justice** • **concerns relating to the**	Permission to undertake this research has been sought and obtained from the school's Board of Management (see appendix 1). Teacher participation is entirely voluntary and all who wish to participate from the total of eleven will be selected for the project. In the pilot, a random selection will be made should more than one teacher volunteer. Anonymity and confidentiality will be assured in advance of the research in writing (see appendix 2) and orally. The participating teacher will not be identified in the assignment that results from the pilot. I will ensure that the participant is made aware of what is involved in the study, both in advance in writing and in person prior to the commencement of the interviews. Written confirmation will be sought from the praticipant to indicate that (s)he understands the study and the giving of infomed consent. (S)he will be informed of the right to withdraw from the study at any time that (s)he wishes up to completion of the assignment (appendix 3). The Interview Schedule is attached. (appendix 4). Power relations between researcher and researched

relationships of power between the researcher(s) and those participating in or affected by the research	require consideration in all research activities, therefore in this insider, collaborative engagement, it is essential that the participating teacher does not feel coerced in any way in this process initiated by myself as his/her principal teacher. The teacher will be assured that should (s)he have different interpretations or perspectives on events from the principal, those perspectives will be respected and will not 'sideline' or disadvantage the teacher in any way. It is intended that the research process will be a mutual learning experience for all participants and by openly sharing information about my research journey so far and the struggles involved in learning to reflect on one's practice in order to understand other perspectives an appreciation of dialogue is being nurtured. The interviews will be digitially recorded. Permission to record will be sought from the participating teacher, who will also have control of the recording device should they wish to stop the recording. This is intended to share the control of the interview. I will transcribe the interviews and both interview transcripts will be shown to the participating teacher to ensure that they are considered an accurate reflection of the interviews. (S)he will be invited to change or add to the transcripts if (s)he considers there is a need. Being a participatory research pilot, the teacher will be asked for some feedback following the interviews and the practical element in relation to the questions, information sheet and consent form. Protection of minors requires serious consideration in all research.The photographic intervention proposed as part of this research will involve the children using school cameras to produce photographs of 'places, people or things that are important to them' in their lives outside of school which the teacher will use in planned learning activities in the classroom. This activity conforms to the national curriculum policy and to recommended teaching and learning activities. It therefore belongs to 'the zone of accepted practice' which is often used to determine whether research is exempt from formal review (Zeni,1998), however in this case as it forms part of the overall research process, ethical approval is sought. As photographs taken by the children will be used in the intervention, as a stimulus for learning projects, the

	photographs and their associated meanings for children need sensitive treatment. As this falls within the 'zone of accepted practice', it is not necessary to obtain the informed consent of the children or give them the option of not participating. As per school policy they have the right not to participate by not requesting the camera. Such a choice if it occurs will be treated sensitively as the well-being of the children is a priority. Parental consent for children's engagement in the project and for photographic use and publication in school publications and blog, will be sought before the project begins in line with school policy and research ethics. In addition children will only contribute photographs of people who have consented to have their image used in a school project (appendix 5). Though the children are more informants rather than participants, they are the co-beneficiaries with teachers if this research deepens our understanding of teaching and learning in this school. The photographs produced by the children will form part of the context of this research, but it is the teacher's understanding and development of knowledge that is the subject. Therefore the photographs will be displayed on a project board and published on the school blog as part of the 'zone of accepted practice'. Digital copies will be archived for retrieval should the project be required by those children at a later stage in their school lives, as per normal school policy. Data protection will be ensured throughout the process. I will transcribe the interviews, excluding the participant's name by using a pseudonym and the transcripts will be stored in a password protected file. Hard copies will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. The data will be made available to my research supervisor if required.
10 Does this research involve children and/or young people?	**Yes** ×☐ **No** ☐ The children themselves will provide the photographic data but this will be in line with curriculum policy and recommended teaching and learning activities as usual for other subjects of study in their school lives. Their consent and anonymity will be protected as outlined above. Only adults will be interviewed

5 Appendixes attached to the end of this form:

1. Letter to request permission from Board of Management to carry out research in the school and the letter of approval to proceed.
2. Invitation to teachers in the school to participate in the research.
3. Information and Informed Consent form for teacher participating in pilot.
4. Interview schedule.
5. Parental information and consent form for children to participate in photo project.

References

British Educational Research Association (BERA), (2011). *Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. http:// www.bera.ac.uk/publications/guidelines

Cregan, Á. (2008). From Difference to Disadvantage:'Talking Posh' Sociolinguistic perspectives on the context of schooling in Ireland. Dublin: *Poverty Research Initiative*.

Donato, R. (2003). Action Research. *ERIC Digest*. Available at: www.cal.org/resources/digest/0308donato.hml [Accessed July 23, 2013].

Harper,D., 2002. Talking about pictures: a case for photo elicitation. *Visual Studies*, 17(10, pp. 13-26

HEA. (2014). *Towards the development of a new National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education*, Dublin. Available at: http://www.hea.ie/sites/default/files/consultation_paper_web_0.pdf.[Accessed 27 August 2014]

Kress, T.(2012). *Critical Praxis Research: Breathing New Life into Research Methods for Teachers.* Dawsonera e-book. Springer.

Swann, M., Peacock, A., Hart, S., and Drummond,M. (2012). *Creating Learning without limits*. Berkshire: Open University Press Mc Graw-Hill Education.

Zappone, K. (2007). Towards a Living System of Education. In: P. Downes, P. and Gilligan, A.L. (eds). *Beyond Educational Disadvantage*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, pp. 10–23.

Zeni, J. (1998). A guide to ethical issues and action research. *Educational Action Research*, *6*(1), 9–19. doi:10.1080/09650799800200053

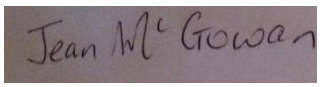
Ethical approval from other bodies

11 Does this research require approval from an external body?	**N/A** **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **If yes, please state which body:**
12 Has ethical approval already been obtained from that body? Please note that such approvals must be obtained before the project begins.	N/A **Yes** ☐ **(Please append documentary evidence to this form.)** **No** ☐ **(If no, please explain why below.)**

APPLICANT SIGNATURE

I hereby request that the CERD Research Ethics Committee review this application for the research as described above, and reply with a decision about its approval on ethical grounds.

I certify that I have read the University's Ethical Principles for Conducting Research with Humans and Other Animals (which can be found online here: http://visit.lincoln.ac.uk/C11/C8/ResearchEthicsPolicy/Document%20Library/Research%20Ethics%20Policy.pdf).



Applicant signature **Date: 6 November 2014**

Jean Mc Gowan

Print name

FOR STUDENT APPLICATIONS ONLY
Academic Support for Ethics

Academic support must be sought from your mentor prior to submitting this form to the CERD Research Ethics Committee.

Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught applicants should obtain approval from their tutor or an academic member of staff nominated by the Department.

Postgraduate Research applicants should obtain approval from their Director of Studies.

I (the undersigned) support this application for ethical approval.

Angela Thody

Academic / Director of Studies signature **Date 14 October 2014**

Print name

For completion by the Chair of the CERD Research Ethics Committee

Please select ONE of A, B, C or D below.

☒ **A. The CERD Research Committee gives ethical approval to this research.**

☐ **B. The CERD Research Committee gives *conditional* ethical approval to this research.**

12 Please state the condition (including the date by which the condition must be satisfied, if applicable).	

☐ **C. The CERD Research Committee cannot give ethical approval to this research but refers the application to the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee for higher level consideration.**

13 Please state the reason.	

☐ **D. The CERD Research Committee cannot give ethical approval to this research and recommends that the research should *not* proceed.**

14 Please state the reason.	

Signature of Chair of School of Education Research Committee (or nominee)

05 January 2015

Signed **Date**

Appendix 2: Information about research and Invitation to teachers to participate

September 2014

Dear Teachers

As you are aware I am undertaking a part-time course in Educational Research and Development with the University of Lincoln. My primary focus is to learn research skills to support the work in this school. The working title of the research is 'Learn Where We Teach'. The Board of Management has approved this research.

As a staff, we are continually trying to improve the learning environment in our school and the outcomes of those efforts are visible in the general improvement in standards and attitudes to learning throughout the school. While there is a general improvement, teachers have expressed concerns about some able children's lack of progress. There are pupils also who do not appear to be fully engaged with the learning opportunities provided in this school, which results in various challenges for them and their teachers.

I am interested in exploring how to improve our understanding as teachers of the challenges and barriers these particular children experience in accessing education. Whilst it is argued that there are many factors which contribute to the underachievement of some children and over which schools and teachers have little influence (DES, 2011), I believe that exploring our own understanding as teachers, of the issues involved, could support us in our work.

Therefore I am looking for volunteers from the teaching staff, to participate in this research project. Initially I hope to work with one teacher on a pilot to inform the research process and later to involve more staff.

What is involved?

Teachers who are willing to participate will be asked to:

- Engage in a classroom action research project called PLACE, which involves using photographs taken by the children in learning activities in class (or similar, you may have other suggestions). PLACE is explained in detail below.
- Take part in two interviews, one before the action research, and one afterwards. The interviews are semi-structured conversations designed to gather teacher views and opinions. The transcripts of the interviews will be made available to the teacher so that the teacher can verify their accuracy.
- Keep a reflective diary for the duration of the project, which is approximately two months.

Those who participate will be considered co-researchers and their views and perspectives will influence and inform the research.

Do you have to take part?

This is an invitation and there is no pressure on anyone to take part. If you are interested and later decide that you do not wish to continue, you can withdraw at any stage.

Confidentiality is assured. The name of this school and the names of participants will not be used in any aspect of the research. However as co-researchers you may wish to be acknowledged and this is open to negotiation. However while the process is ongoing anonymity is guaranteed.

PLACE

PLACE is a project that aims to hear the child's own voice, based on the child's own interests using the medium of photography as a stimulus for dialogue with teachers, and children and their families.

Our school is based in a socially and economically disadvantaged part of _____ town. Many of our children's parents have not benefited from the education system as much as one would hope, and subsequently appear to have difficulty supporting their children's acquisition of the skills and competencies required to access the full benefits of education.

We have an explicit aim in this school to create ways that are inclusive of all voices and ways of knowing so that all participants in our school feel they and their knowledge are valued. This appears to pose a challenge as it can be difficult for teachers who do not live in the area and who have had a different educational experience to fully understand the lived experiences of some of the children. It is also challenging as the demands of the curriculum and the pressure to continually raise standards leaves little time to reflect on our current practice. With those concerns in mind the PLACE project outlined below is intended as a means of starting/ continuing a dialogue and connection for teachers and children.

- PLACE stands for Photographs that stimulate Language, Learning and Communication in Education.
- How it works: Teachers model the process first, by showing the children a photograph of something that is important to them. They say why it is important and even write down a few lines about it. Children can ask questions about the photo.
- Then children are asked would they like to take a photograph to show to teacher of something that is important to them. Parental consent is sought and parents are invited to be part of the project.
- Children are given cameras on a rota to take photos at home and choose one that is of something that is important to them. It might be a toy, a place, a person. Parents look at the photograph so that they know what the child is going to show and talk about.
- In school, the child has a conversation with teacher and tells about their photograph. Teacher listens, asks some questions and scribes the account. The written account is sent home for parents to read. They might want to add to, or clarify with their child some additional information or it may be fine as is.
- The teacher will endeavour to include the interests of the child in planning for classroom activities in cross-curricular areas. Creative activities may evolve and be suggested by the content of the photograph and the child's account, including music, poetry and art.
- Ample opportunity for teacher creativity is factored in and individual teachers will develop and adapt this project to suit their particular class needs and interests.

The rationale for PLACE is that to really base learning in a child's own environment (as stated in the principles of the Primary Curriculum) teachers need a way to find out what is important to the children. Photography does not depend on literacy levels, but it does facilitate the authentic use and development of literacy skills. Photography as intended in

this project facilitates teachers to scaffold learning. The project is intended to hear the voices of children, parents and teachers.

PLACE depends on teacher willingness to actively listen and engage in dialogue, starting from the interest point of the pupil. It is intended as a way of connecting home and school and journeying together on a path that leads to teacher and pupil learning in the broader sense.

The research will focus on teachers' perceptions of what they learn from the process about the lived experiences of the children outside school and if this influences teaching approaches in any way.

Conclusion

I hope that this research will deepen our understanding of teaching and learning in this school. I also hope that is will provide an opportunity for dialogue about our practice and support our annual School Self Evaluation. Those who volunteer to participate in the research will be contributing to the dialogue and their perspectives will enrich the findings.

If you would like more information I can arrange to meet with you. I'd welcome an opportunity to discuss any questions you raise or hear suggestions you may have.

I am currently applying for ethical approval from Lincoln University to proceed with this research. If approved, and if a teacher volunteers to participate, the pilot ideally will commence in October 2014.

If you would like to participate or would like more information before you decide, fill in the slip below.

Kind Regards

Jean

'Learn Where We Teach'.

I'd like more information before I make a decision on whether or not to participate. ☐

or

I am interested in participating in the research project outlined. ☐

If interested, tick one or both options.

I am interested in participating in the pilot project ☐

I am interested in participating after the pilot, when the process is refined. ☐

Name of Teacher _____

Appendix 3: Interview Schedule

1. We can start with your own school days. Tell me about the primary school you attended.
Prompts: Location, size, faith, teachers, extra-curricular activities, your parents' involvement with your primary education
2. What type of secondary school did you attend?
Prompts: Location, size, faith, teachers, extra-curricular activities, your parents' involvement with your primary education
3. Thinking back, what factors in your life as a child supported your learning?
Prompts: books, music, sport, influential people, specific events,
4. What supports do you think children need in order to gain maximum benefit from the educational system?
5. Moving on, I'd like you to tell me why you chose Primary Teaching as a career?
Prompts: Influential people, own school experience, change of career, interest in working with children
6. How do you feel your experience of Initial Teacher Training prepared you for your role as a teacher?
Prompts: classroom management, curricular content, pedagogy, understanding the various cultural contexts of pupils
7. What factors have supported your learning since you began your teaching career?
Prompts: Practice in various schools, colleagues, professional development courses, reflection on practice
8. Do you remember your first impressions of this school when you began teaching here?
Prompts: What aspects made an impact on you?
9. How have those impressions changed or not over the time you have worked here?
10. You spoke earlier about the factors that supported your learning as a child. As a teacher here in this school, what differences/similarities do you notice about the factors that support children's learning in this school /community?
11. From your experience what topics or areas are the children in this school most interested in?
12. How do you find out what they are most interested in?
12 (b). Can you give an example?
13. What strategies do you use or have you used to connect their interests outside of school with learning in school, as envisioned in *The Primary School Curriculum*?
14. What challenges do you perceive or experience when trying to make these connections?
15. As you know, some of our children do not achieve the level of attainment they are capable of. What changes would you implement if you could, to enable them to reach their potential?

Post AR
1. Describe your experience of the PLACE project with your class.
Prompts: subject matter of photos, children's willingness to engage, parental involvement, level of communicative language project facilitated, curricular connections between topics suggested by photos, challenges the project presented
2. What did you learn about the children's background that you did not already know?
Prompts: hobbies, talents, friends, family, hopes, fears
3. Did the project facilitate you as a teacher to connect learning in school with the interests of the children outside of school in any way?
4. Is there anything else you would like to include regarding your involvement in this research?

Appendix 4: Parental Consent Information and Form

School Name

Date

Dear Parents,

We are starting a project called PLACE, in our class.
PLACE stands for 'Photographs that stimulate Language, Learning and Communication in Education'.
What is involved?
All the children will be invited to use school cameras to photograph some things in their lives outside school that are important to them. Photographs could be of pets, toys, people, places or whatever they decide to photograph. Your child will then show the photos to you so that you know what they consider important and what they will tell their teacher about. In school, they will talk about their photographs. One will be chosen. Teacher will write what they say and send it home to you. You will want to read it and might want to add more detail. Then your child will bring it back to school.
The children's photographs will be used in a classroom project, designed to connect their interests outside of school with their learning in school. If we know more about what they are interested in we can include those interests in reading and writing, maths, art and computer based lessons in particular and it will help us as teachers, research and develop connections between home and school. It is easier for children to talk about their interests when they have a photo to show as well. Your support and help would be very valuable to this project.
If you would like your child (_____) to take part in this project, please sign the consent form below. It means that you are happy for _____ to bring home a camera from school to take photos of things that are important to him/her. You will look at the photos. If there is a photo of a person please ask that person if their image can be used in a school project. (The photo might be on a classroom display board or in a project/blog). All photos will be erased from the camera before it is given to the next child.
If you have any questions about the project, please contact either _____ (Teachers Name) or Mrs Mc Gowan.
Regards

_____	_____
Name of Teacher	Jean Mc Gowan
Class Teacher	Principal

Consent for my child to take part in The PLACE Project.

I have read the information about the PLACE project.
I understand

- That my child will take a camera home from school to take photographs of things that are important to him/her.
- That I will look at the photos before my child takes them to school.
- That the photos will be used in class for discussion and learning activities.
- That it may be used in class/school publications (project/blog) for learning activities.
- That the photos will be used by teachers to research more ways of connecting home and school in the learning opportunities provided for the children.

I give consent for _____ to take part in this project.

Signed _____

Date _____

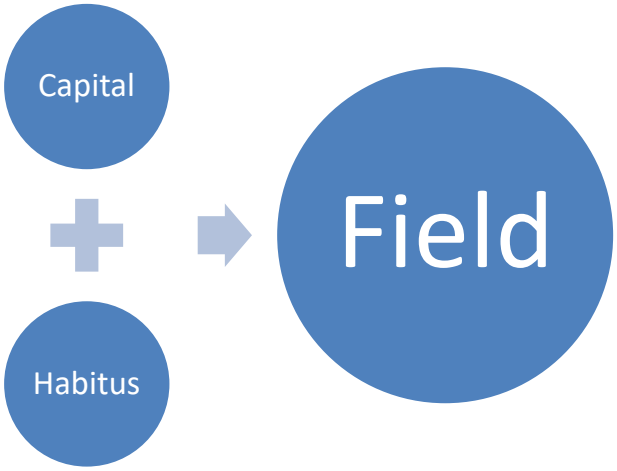
Appendix 5: Collaborative Group Discussion and Feedback Document

Group meeting: Document shared with teachers in January 2016 after two cycles of PRE-AR interviews were conducted. Two participants had engaged in the classroom action research intervention - PLACE. The document was used as a prompt for a discussion of how the research was progressing. All of the six participants were present.

The research so far:
6 participants have engaged in the first of two interviews.
In all interviews participants reported that in their childhoods they had:
Great support from their family for their education
Came from homes where education was valued.
Came from homes where resources were used to support children's engagement in education
Came from homes which viewed education as a route to a better future/job/career
All mentioned a role model or role models (either a family member or primary school teacher) who influenced their decision to become teachers

Routes into teaching differ with 3 doing postgraduate courses and 3 going directly into ITE from secondary school.
In all but one case, ITE was not remembered as changing your view of teaching. In a sense it was described as preparing us to do what we had seen others do well in our own schooling. All 6 participants had succeeded in school.

My story of primary, secondary and ITE is very similar. Since I have started learning about Educational Research, I'm reading literature that I had not come across before. One French sociologist who was interested in educational research has made me think about things I have basically taken for granted, like my supportive background. His name was Pierre Bourdieu. The diagram shows the concept that has made me think differently.
Capital: Not just financial, but the things we learn at home, the people we know, the hobbies we have etc.
Habitus: A way of behaving that we don't even realise we have. It's just how we learn to behave, what we think is important.
Field: Any place where we engage with other people. Every field has its own rules about what is desirable. What is desirable in a GAA club is different from what is desirable in a golf club. If you have been raised in GAA culture it comes naturally, you know how to behave, talk about matches, etc. You have from your background the knowledge and way of behaving that helps you fit in, without much effort. Could the same be said of school?



Whilst it is argued that no one cultural capital is better than any other, rather each is situational, (Chase, 2012), if one's cultural capital prepares one for the requisites of the educational system, one has an advantage in it. One feels at home in the field of school, and may not perceive that others do not.

In the interviews with all 6 participants, it was evident from the conversations that:

Every single teacher without exception expressed a really strong desire to support the children's learning, the children's wellbeing, their social and emotional development.
In most of the conversations, concern was expressed that some children were not achieving their learning potential.
In addition most teachers felt that parental support was a requisite for children reaching their potential in school. However this creates a dilemma for many teachers when parents do not seem to place adequate emphasis on supporting their children's education or have barriers in their lives which prevent them supporting their children's learning.

So how do we connect with the learning potential of children who may have a different habitus from their teachers?

The principles on which the 'Primary School Curriculum' are based state that the child's existing knowledge and experience should form the base for learning (NCCA, 1999).
The following questions were asked in the interviews:
Q. From your experience what topics or areas are the children in this school most interested in?

Responses:

Their pets, things that they have at home, like their pets. You know if we are talking about pets or we are doing pets in school, things like that , that links it to themselves. They can make a link to it. So I suppose it is topics or things that you do in school that they really relate to.

They love talking about their own environment, their own families, their wider circle on the street, their neighbours, people in their community. They love talking about those kinds of things. Places that they go to, events that happen in the area

They love the SESE subjects; they enjoy everyday things, projects, things that are of relevance to them. They like doing 'transport' or 'communications' things like that. They like those topics, they love the art and it's great for them all to get these opportunities. P.E as well.

I think they can become interested in a lot of different areas. I think it's how you approach it. They love practical activities, when they are involved and they are leading it. They get to show you what they are doing. It means something to them. At this age they like play, if you can relate it to things they are interested in, that always helps as well. I'm trying to think of different specific topics, it's hard but they like talking about themselves and what's important to them. There are some who like giving their news and then there are children who like to give it quietly on their own, so you need to provide that time as well just to talk. And it's just everyday things that they come across I suppose. The shop down there, they are mad to be in a shop, mad to be shop keeper and I suppose it something they see every day but don't get to do, like operating a till and using the scanner, using the money and giving the money back. That's a huge thing from a child's point of view. We set up the doctor's surgery and they get to be the doctor or the nurse or even the receptionist and they use the fancy phone. Things they observe in their everyday life and they would like to try. Things like that.

Q. How do you find out?
Responses:
Through check in games in circle time
Show and tell
I suppose talking to them and taking an interest in what they are saying is important
Through formal and informal oral language lessons
A lot of things you find out in passing
From their free writing or PWIM generated a lot of discussion

The following excerpts show the constraints under which teachers are operating when trying to connect learning in school with the children's lives

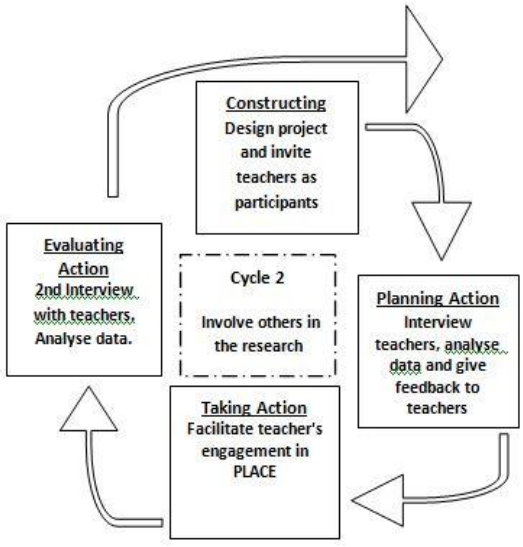
1.*It's just the time as a teacher, it's so hard, and then because you are so confined by the strands and the strand units, and you think, if I do that topic on 'whatever, fishing, football, whatever because so many are interested in it, how will that tie in with that' so you are looking at all the material you have to do, and you as a teacher have to prove that you are doing all this, and I'd love to do what they are interested in but I can't because I have to do this, this and this.*

2.*I think it would be time and finding information. If something is localised to such an extent, you are not going to access that information, by googling or whatever, you might have to go out and find someone who knows it.*
Because you have premade resources, you have information in a book, or it's ready online or it's there at the click of a button, it probably would take a little bit more effort to take something that the child is interested in, and then go and prepare say teaching experiences based on that

3. *Time, it's time to get round to every child to find out what's important to them. And that's not easy. It's easy in a class to find out what the big characters are interested in, their voice will be heard. It's hard to get round to children who maybe need a little bit of time with you.*
4. *Time is a huge element and you want to make sure that you are giving enough time to getting their writing done because at the end of the day, they still need lots and lots of practice with their letters and with practice with their reading.*
5. *The curriculum is so detailed and you are under a lot of time pressure to get it completed as well.*
6. *Some children are quite shy and it's difficult to get them to talk and we are going into term 2 and there's two or three children you'd like to be a bit more open. I just find that difficult. If they don't talk to you much, it's difficult to find out what they are into.*

In addition none of us live in this area so we do not have shared community knowledge with the children.
Much has been written on the importance of children seeing themselves in the curriculum and having their knowledge valued in school. This is difficult to achieve in the current system of standardisation and when we do not share their community knowledge.
However action research may give us an opportunity see different possibilities, if we allow ourselves the professional permission to do so and start with small steps.
I'm suggesting PLACE project as that starting point but you are free to choose a different option to connect the children's lives outside of school with the curriculum.

Research Diagram



The diagram shows the cycle of research. We are at the 2nd step. It now becomes our AR and your participation is valued.
The action research now moves to the 3rd step on the diagram of the cycle where you work with your pupils on PLACE
There are no prescribed outcomes to achieve; it is all about making connections that you as a teacher will reflect on; and then use your professional judgement to act on.
Afterwards we can then discuss your findings in the second interview (Step 4)
All of this is in line with 'Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers' (Teaching Council, 2012). See page 7 of the Code.

Appendix 6: Emerging Codes, Grouping Codes and Defining Codes

Codes that emerged during analysis of Pre-Ar interview transcript during Cycle 1

Topic	In Vivo Codes	1st round of coding	Definite/tentative
Own school experience	"Lovely", "I really enjoyed it", "close knit community", "teacher relationship", "be like her", "sport", "local", "involved", "supportive parents", "approachable teachers",	• Positive affective memories of primary school and secondary school. • Substantial parental involvement in her school • Role of national sports	Definite certain telling of past experience
Why teaching was chosen as a career	"To be like Ms F____". "I decided in 1st class I wanted to be a primary school teacher". "Ambition", "Got me to where I am today", "supportive"	• Role models • Strength of tradition of teaching. • Values observation of practice over theory	Definite certain telling of past experience
Parental Involvement in her own education	"Very supportive", "helped with homework", "volunteered in school", "fundraised", "member of Board of management"	• Role of Parents	Definite certain telling of past experience
Factors that supported her own learning development	"First of all my parents", "Ms F___", "Sport was a break from studying or homework", "there was always someplace to go", "we were always brought", "if you have ambition go for it"	• Role model • Parents • Community • Sport • Ambition	Definite certain telling of past experience
Connections with the children in the current school	"Consider their background", "seemed friendly", "liked their classroom and teacher, I think", "opened my eyes", "lucky to have"	• Limited knowledge and understanding of children • No connections with school community	tentative
Barriers to connecting with children	"Consider their background", "the curriculum is so detailed" "Standardised testing", "children get disheartened" "Lack of time", "too much emphasis on literacy and numeracy", "it's not real to them"	• Different background of children assumed but not known • Constraints of the profession • Constraints of the Education System	Definite
Purpose of education	"Get a career" "Decided I wanted to be a primary teacher" "They might get a job in sport"	• Preparation for role as worker	Definite
Professional development and Initial Teacher Education	"Only so much[theory] you can take in", "see it in operation", "see what other teachers have done", "their stations, behaviour management systems, reward systems", "the theory was excellent but",	• Values observation of practice over theory • Emphasis on behaviour management	Definite
Suggested changes for improving education of children in this school	"Less standardised testing", "more practical learning activities and sport, music and art", "make it more real to children's lives", "I went down on standardised tests"	• Own experience as child influences teacher perspective. • Wants to bring about improvements, but is unable due to 'system'	Definite

Appendix 7: Table of Code Definitions

Formative Stage -FS	The teacher's perceptions of life before they starting teaching, including childhood, schooling, parental involvement, decisions to choose teaching as a career, Initial Teacher education
FS Memories	The teacher's memories of own school days (as articulated by teacher whether positive, negative, neutral, vivid or vague)
FS Parental Involvement in Teacher's Education - Acknowledged	The teacher's perceptions of how involved their parents were in their education
FS Parental Involvement in Teacher's Education - Unacknowledged	Parental support interpreted from conversation but unacknowledged by teacher.
FS Childhood Activities	Activities named as important in childhood including hobbies, sport
FS Role models	Role models identified by the teacher as influential for choice of teaching career.
FS Affective Qualities	Emotions, attitudes, values and beliefs evident in the teacher's recollections of their formative education.
FS Collective Features of Participants' Formative Years	Collective and recurring features in participants' accounts of formative years
FIPS Formative stage intersected with Practice stage	Where teachers recall events, acts or beliefs that were evident in formative years and still evident in practicing years.
FIPS-Vision of Teaching	How the teacher describes or articulates their perception of the role of teacher.
FIPS-VOT- Teacher of knowledge	The teacher mainly articulates the notion that knowledge and skills are taught to children. The teacher knows and the children learn
FIPS-VOT-Facilitator of Learning	The teacher articulates the notion that the role of teacher is to guide and scaffold children's learning by building on their prior knowledge and skills
FIPS-VOT-Continuous learning about teaching in context	The teacher articulates the view that teaching involves constant learning about the children, approaches to use and their own development as a person
FIPS-Purpose of Education	The teacher's perception about the purpose of education
FIPS-POE- Preparation for employment	Is the emphasis of education on preparation for work?
FIPS-POE- Holistic Personal and Social Development	Holistic development of person for living, with emphasis on social, emotional, spiritual, physical and intellectual abilities
FIPS-Teacher learning Style	How the teacher learns and the type of learning described as beneficial
FIPS-TLS- Observation of experienced others	Observation of practice of more experienced teachers
FIPS-TLS- Discussion with others	Discussion with colleagues
FIPS-TLS- Reading, research and experimentation	Reading, research and experimentation
FIPS-TLS- Reflective Practice	Reflection on practice
FIPS-Community Engagement	Community Engagement: The communities the teacher is involved in
FIPS-CE-origin	Engagement with own original community
FIPS-CE-in school	Engagement with in-school community
FIPS-CE- of Oakwood community	Engagement with community of the school and children
FIPS - Teacher Ambition	Ambition: That ambition to achieve something and willingness to strive to for that achievement is articulated in dialogue
FIPS-Amb-past	Teacher recalls a sense of ambition to be a teacher and worked to achieve that ambition
FIPS-Amb-cur	Teacher currently articulates an ambition

FIPS - Affective Qualities-	Emotions, attitudes, values and beliefs that straddled both formative and practising stages
FIPS - Collective Features	The recurring themes and interpretations collectively evident in participants' accounts of formative years and still evident in practicing years.
PS -Practising Stage	The stage since the teacher has commenced teaching
PS-Agency	Sense of Agency: Does the teacher articulate a feeling of control or management of their teaching role
PS-Agency-Curriculum	Does the teacher articulate feeling of agency in the role of teacher regarding curricular decisions?
PS-Agency-Practice	Does the teacher articulate feeling a sense of agency in the role of teacher regarding current teaching practice?
PS-Knowledge of children's lives in context	Knowledge and understanding of children's lives outside school. Does the teacher articulate aspects of this knowledge in conversation about current children taught?
PS- connections with community knowledge of children	Connections with the community of the school children. Does the teacher articulate aspects of this knowledge in conversation about current children taught?
PS-Improvement of practice Proposals	Proposals for Improvement of educational practice in this school
PS-Own Childhood activities in Current Practice	Teacher's childhood activities evident in practice
PS-luck	School children perceived as luckier now
PS-Assumptions about children	Teacher assumptions about children
PS-Assumptions about parents	Teacher assumptions about children's parents
PS- Affective Qualities	Emotions, attitudes, values and beliefs expressed by teacher about practice
PS- Changed- Affective Qual	Emotions, attitudes, values and beliefs that differed in previous stages
PS- Collective Features	The recurring themes that emerged in participants' discussion of their career stage since they commenced teaching
ARP-Action Research Phase	Teacher's experience during Action Research
ARP - Positives	The aspects of PLACE that the teacher evaluated positively
ARP- Challenges	The aspects of PLACE that posed dilemmas, difficulties and challenges for the teacher
ARP-AR-Learning- PLACE	Aspects about children, their parents and community that the teacher reported learning through engagement in PLACE
ARP-AR Learning- Self	Aspects of teacher's own knowledge/assumptions/practice that were challenged through engagement in PLACE
ARP- AR- Agency	Evidence during PLACE of teacher's judgement in connecting children's lived experience with learning in school
ARP-AR - Collective	Themes that recurred in various teachers' accounts of the experience during Action Research
PAR-Post Action Research	Teacher reflections on the experience of Action Research through PLACE
PAR- Changing Assumptions	Teacher's assumptions about pupil motivation, parental interest, their own knowledge and social prejudice changed since PRE-Ar interview
PAR- Perceptions	More enhanced perceptions of children's and parents' positive attributes
PAR- Recognition	Recognition of children's prior contextual knowledge.
PAR- Question Raising	When reflection on the experience of PLACE action research provoked a teacher to question familiar school practices with a view to including more contextual knowledge of the school community in school activities
PAR- Collective Responses	Themes that recurred in participants' reflections on the experience of Action Research through PLACE